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WALTER DE LA MARE:

A BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL STUDY

BY

R. L. MÉGROZ

HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
LIMITED LONDON





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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY MORRISON AND GIBB LTD., EDINBURGH

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TO  
MY FRIEND  
ERNEST H. CONNELL, M.B., CH.B.  
LECTURER IN PSYCHIATRY AT EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY





## PREFATORY NOTE

WHEN the industrious Monsieur Taine's system of criticism was laid under the scalpel of Sainte-Beuve's gentle irony it became evident that the laborious method of science, the patient compilation of data from history, biography and economics, could never result finally in a satisfactory account of any writer's genius. Criticism then began to undergo a process of purging, which the erudite Signor Croce has—in the Italian fashion—carried to its logical extreme. Some critics decided for personal taste as the arbiter of artistic excellence; others, classically minded, fell back upon principles. The process has been gradual. The result of this elucidation and delimitation of criticism has been to send one critic along the path of technique and æsthetics, another into religion or philosophy, and another into social history.

Readers coming to a book which professes to give an account of so fine an artist as Mr. Walter de la Mare may very likely expect to

find more specialisation in any one of these directions than actually has been attempted. Hence this note, which is an attempt to excuse what would, from the point of view of any specialist, be shortcomings. Treading what is almost virgin soil, I felt that broad outlines, fundamentally right, and, for the rest, suggestive asides, would be the proper programme for this book. I have been chiefly at pains to show the poet of dream in a human light and in relation to the rest of society, and also to contradict the too common belief that he is narrow in range of thought and interests and technique.

I am, of course, indebted to Mr. de la Mare for the biographical information which constitutes the most valuable portion of a first book dealing with his work. If the language often seems dry and matter-of-fact in appreciation of so delicate a poetic craft, perhaps that is due to the pioneer's preoccupation with the variety of things to be observed in this wonderful new region of English literature.



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*The author is indebted to Mr. Walter de la Mare and to his various publishers—Messrs. Longmans, Messrs. Collins, Messrs. Constable, Messrs. Selwyn and Blount, and Messrs. Duckworth—for the use of copyright material, without which this book could not have been made.*





## CHAPTER I

### PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS

WALTER DE LA MARE at fifty years of age conveys by his personal presence first of all an impression of controlled power and an infinite catholicity of interests. He does not talk, and he does not look "like" the frail bloom of the dream-born poetry which is generally associated with his name. There is nothing obviously apparent of the seer's wildness about him which popular imagination has associated with the typical poet. But a recognition of the fitness of things follows the first shock of surprise which almost inevitably is experienced by an admirer of his poetry meeting him in the flesh. His square-set figure, about 5 feet 8 inches in height, and his strong face belong to a man possessing the tremendous energy which goes to work of creative imagination. Only gradually does one learn to see the shadowiness and haunted light of elusive moods which pass over his mind and conversation, or

to perceive some of the remote associations of his casual remarks.

These impressions were gained when I once interviewed Mr. de la Mare at his house in Anerley, close to the south-eastern edge of London. His courteous invitation to me was the more kind in that he has a natural dread of all publicity. If I have been fortunate enough since then to enjoy his friendship the fact remains that, from the date of the interview until the completion of this book, I have been continually prevailing upon his good nature against his inclinations to give me the interesting biographical information which is reproduced here. As for that first interview, part of it ought to be retold. I fully expected to find some kind of Swinburnian eccentricity about the haunted poet of *The Listeners*. Surely he would be discovered amid a wild litter of manuscripts, with flaming eyes and floating hair, or the equivalent of these! But instead I was ushered into the cheerful company of his family of sons and daughters, greeted first by Mrs. de la Mare, and then, before I could fully adjust my mental forces, by the poet himself. He strode into the room with the gait of a sailor, the figure of a yeoman, and a strong, mobile face irradiated with his smile. Some old tweed suit he wore suggested at once negligence



about dress and sufficient respect for the social proprieties. His high, knotted and domed brow, partly concealed by the short, rather ragged, hair, and his *solid*-looking head, perhaps fortified the impression he conveyed of a hard-thinking scientist taking a brief social recreation. Later that evening several people distinguished in contemporary letters joined the fireside party, and nothing could have seemed more remote from the conventional notion of the dreamer's other-worldliness than the active and hearty participation in the lively general conversation by the author of *Henry Brocken* and of so many mysteriously beautiful poems. Further experience has only confirmed the impressions gained on that occasion. No great artist ever seemed less troubled by the feeling of remoteness from the common interests; one may talk with him and forget that he is not an ordinary man. The realisation that his mind is of unusual range and eagerness comes of subsequent reflection.

But in his family circle one may find oneself in a twinkling, at any moment, in wonderland on the other side of Alice's looking-glass. On the evening already referred to, the conversation rippled round the candlelit and firelit room, and certain poems of De la Mare seemed to flit into

the soft shadows and wavering light. He had been telling me that he thought fiction and poetry ran into one another.

“ Surely we ought not to praise a new novel for being ‘ true to life ’ ! ” he exclaimed, with a shade of characteristic diffidence in his voice. “ There is a composite character about the truth of fiction. A work of fiction should first have for the reader a recognisable resemblance to life, and if a story has a liberal measure of this kind of truth for the general reader, it has a quality I should call universality. I have heard that the most popular books in Russia are *Paradise Lost* and *Three Men in a Boat* ! But of course there is also a personal element, that which is true to the writer’s individuality. Every one is in some respects different from any one else, either in faculties of mind or in circumstance and surroundings.”

“ But does that mean that we see the universe in a unique way ? ”

“ Why, yes, don’t you think so ? ” replied Mr. de la Mare. “ Don’t you think that the essential truth for each one of us is in our individual imagination ? ”

“ But it’s the same universe for all ? ”

“ How do you *know* ? We can never know the inside of another’s mind. Every man sup-

poses in the silence of his heart that he is in some degree unique. An egotist is merely a man who *always* prefers I to We."

"Is fiction, then, a kind of spiritual autobiography?"

"I should say that a fine work of fiction must reflect truly the first-hand knowledge and experience of the life of its writer. It must, as we say, be sincere; an attempt to convey a kind of—not matter-of-fact—but matter-of-truth."

"So that good fiction is only partly autobiographical?"

"Yes, it is neither a copy of life in general nor of the author's particular life. It is a compound; its materials are selected and re-shaped, and so we get a new unity which comes from the imagination."

It was then that the conversation became general. There were two candles gleaming behind me. I first became aware of them when Mr. de la Mare turned and offered me a cigarette, and suggested a candle to light it by. He sat with his back to the oblong dark of a window. The ladies present adding a brightness to the shadowy room brought me a far-away sense. As I gazed at the fire a remembrance shut me off from the voices and the smiling faces, a

remembrance of a stanza in that lovely poem,  
"The Revenant":

"O all ye fair ladies, with your colours and your graces,  
And your eyes clear in flame of candle and hearth,  
To'rd the dark of this old window lift not up your smiling  
faces,  
Where a shade stands forlorn from the cold of the earth."

The memory of these things seems appropriate here, to fill in the picture of an intensely human personality who is also a unique artist of modern literature. With the reader's permission, therefore, a few more recollections follow.

In an interstice of the general conversation about imagination, I asked the poet how his theory of fiction would apply to *Alice in Wonderland*. It was a lucky shot.

"One finds that *Alice in Wonderland* is made of the substance of the writer's experience of life—transmuted, of course. And it has also shape and form. An indefinable aura hangs over the child and her scenery. Every object is exquisitely false, and yet exquisitely true to actuality. The illusion is so fascinating that a little girl friend of mine, reading this tale, burst out crying at the end to find it was a dream! Seemingly anything could happen in such a region as Alice is in. But of course, freedom from



the ordinary laws of nature and society means that Lewis Carroll was far from free as an artist. Imagine Carroll bringing into the story some of the laws which are excluded. Imagine the effect if the March Hare suggested, ' You must, of course, recollect, my good child, that I am only in fact a kind of animal made up to amuse the nursery.' Or suppose the Mad Hatter were to quote from his author's *Symbolic Logic* ! "

It will be instructive to study the dream-like atmosphere of De la Mare's most descriptive prose in the light of the above illuminating criticism. Intensity of imagination throws a glamour over the solid, " true-to-life " facts in the novels just as completely as it transforms the words of our common speech into something rare and strange in the poems which utter hunger for " the region Elenore " (as Francis Thompson called it), " where," according to Walter de la Mare,

" Where blooms the flower when her petals fade,  
Where sleepeth echo by earth's music made,  
Where all things transient to the changeless win."

How this hunger can coexist with an avid participation in our human life and a controlled activity belonging to the proverbial " man of Character " will be a subject of more consideration later. To return to that memorable evening,

the next topic of conversation was the child's powers of understanding. Mr. de la Mare not only thought that children can understand much more than adults realise ; he expressed the belief that the very young child, the infant, possesses all the mental faculties of the mature person, though its field of observation may be narrower. He was now accompanying me to my stationward tram, and we were walking in the misty gold twilight of street lamps.

"What is your opinion of the value of school education ?" I asked.

"It is much easier to lay down the law of education than to apply it," Mr. de la Mare replied. "The chief thing is perhaps to *interest* the child. It seems, too, better to learn one thing well, when you think of the enormous amount of knowledge in the world—knowledge you can never possess."

"But is there not a kind of understanding of the essence of all knowledge ? Don't you, as it were, knowing a few things, see in them all other things ?"

We had paused at the tram-stop. Mr. de la Mare turned suddenly towards me in the gloaming, his dark eyes alight. "But how can you tell what others know, how much they know, that you cannot know ?" he said.

“ But what you said just now would be an argument in defence of giving pupils Latin to learn thoroughly, instead of trying to cover a lot of subjects. Would it not ? ”

“ Yes, so far. But the central idea in education is surely to enable the child to use its faculties rather than to get a certain amount of knowledge into its head. And I think every one, every teacher, would agree that the really valuable gains of one's education are the things you teach yourself. I remember my headmaster one day found me reading Locke on *The Conduct of the Understanding*. Anxious for my practical welfare, he asked: ‘ Don't you think you would be more usefully employed at French ? ’ But I must have been revealing a natural bent.”

Mr. de la Mare had just told me that he never went to a University, but was educated at St. Paul's (Cathedral) School, when moving lights twinkled through the evening haze.

“ Have you any favourite among your poems ? ”  
I asked.

“ No.”

“ How do you generally begin writing a poem ? ”

“ I simply forget how any particular poem was written. One is not entirely master of the method of expression. I fancy that when one

is working in that way it is an abnormal mental condition."

In a moment my tram would lurch up to the stopping-place.

"Is the sense of beauty fundamental?" I asked; "because Hudson says it is in his last book, *A Hind in Richmond Park*, and contradicts Santayana, and declares too, that the sense of beauty is not necessarily due to the sex impulse."

As I concluded, Mr. de la Mare shook his head in a vigorous negative. "It is not sex. But I can never understand Santayana myself. Of course, Hudson is right about the sense of beauty being fundamental. The difficulty comes in using a term like 'beauty.' I suppose beauty and fitness for purpose go together; what do you think? . . . But here is your tram!"

Alas! it was. As I boarded the tram the poet vanished into the gentle obscurity of the mist, and a wonderful experience was ended for me.

This conversation, and the unselfconscious eagerness of the poet to take up any interesting point in conversation, is a true reflection of his personality. The very last conversation with him which I enjoyed was during last summer.



when I spent a few happy days with Mr. de la Mare and his family at a farm in a beautiful countryside which looks out on the Atlantic. I was due to return to London, and he, with his youngest son, Colin, was walking over fields, accompanying me to the railway station. A discussion was started by Mr. de la Mare, who wanted to know why the thin foot-track across a field always took a series of curves or twists instead of passing in a straight line from point to point. The debate lasted about fifteen minutes. I would not have believed there were such interesting speculations inherent in the subject as actually were drawn out of that discussion.

The poet's lectures on literature reveal the same restless inquisitiveness about the meanings of inexplicable and beautiful things. He seems to possess a surplus energy which will not leave him satisfied with the appearances which usually pass muster for reality. I remember being present one evening at a dinner of the Whitefriars Club, when Mr. de la Mare was the guest of honour, and he was to address the gathering after dinner. He was clearly in a state of tension throughout the first part of the evening, for there is, in spite of his comradeship and generosity with individuals, something

in him which shrinks from the psychic impact of an assembled audience. His subject was announced as "Monologue." That, to begin with, was entirely characteristic, but it left the members of the dinner-party very much in the dark. And of course when he proceeded to read his address on "Monologue" in that dining-room at the very heart of Fleet Street, the exquisite complexity of his thought and its jewelled vestments of glittering images and exact metaphor surpassed the bounds of all rational expectation. And he read his beautiful address at top speed in a strained voice. "Monologue" in his mind became a survey of the whole of life; a ransacking of the riches of flowers, insects, grasses, trees; an Aladdin's lamp in the deepest recesses of the human mind and the most mysterious arcana of speculation, philosophic and poetic. When that essay is published, and it surely must be preserved for us in print, it will be recognised as a fine piece of prose and a scintillating excursion of poetic thought. But emphatically it was not an after-dinner speech, and only a company of distinguished journalists could have recovered from their stupor so promptly as that company recovered, once the courageous Mr. George Sampson had opened the general "discussion."

But this reminds me how the author of *The Return* discovered on behalf of Arthur Lawford that a spider's eyes appear green in a certain light! That is a vivid moment in chapter i. when Arthur Lawford in his curiosity knelt down beside the tombstone of Nicholas Sabathier "and peeped into the gaping cranny. There he encountered merely the tiny, pale-green, faintly conspicuous eyes of a large spider, confronting his own. It was for the moment an alarming, and yet a faintly fascinating experience. The little almost colourless fires remained so changeless." The author of that was a small boy when he saw the spider's eyes while on hands and knees in the dining-room. He was seeking something on the floor and looked up and saw a spider on the under-side of a chair, and stopped to gaze at it. There is a method in his curiosity. Any reader of "the story" of "Come Hither!" will recognise that small boy as one with the friend of Miss Taroone.

Such impressions, random perhaps, belong to a picture of the poet as a man. Believing that a century hence such material, however unimportant the busybody gathering it, will be not less useful to later students than contemporary records of Coleridge and Keats are to us, I have not scrupled to preface this

biographical sketch with so much personal reminiscence.

The creative fertility of the poet's mind, which is so evident in Mr. de la Mare to every one who has made his acquaintance, is a quality of youth, or rather of the child.

"Poets . . . may be divided, for illustration and convenience, into two distinct classes: those who in their idiosyncrasies resemble children and bring to ripeness the faculties peculiar to childhood; and those who resemble lads. On the one hand is the poet who carries with him through life, in varying vigour and variety, the salient characteristics of childhood (though modified, of course, by subsequent activities and experience). On the other is the poet who carries with him the salient characteristics of boyhood (though modified by the experiences and activities of his childhood)." Thus, in an essay on Rupert Brooke, he provided a classification, "for illustration and convenience," of the utmost pertinence to the present theme. He is primarily a poet of childhood; he is the primary poet of childhood in English literature. His work springs mainly from dream-thought, not the philosophical synthesis; from a mental and psychic activity which belongs to the sub-conscious level of life in which man is kin to the



animals and the child's soul is a mirror of the primitive savage's. "What are the salient characteristics of childhood?" he asks, and fortunately (for none other is so well qualified) he answers the question:

"Children . . . live in a world peculiarly their own, so much so that it is doubtful if the adult can do more than very fleetingly reoccupy that far-away consciousness. There is . . . no doubt that the world of the grown-up is to children an inexhaustible astonishment and despair. . . . Children are in a sense butterflies, though they toil with an almost inconceivable assiduity after life's scanty pollen and nectar, and though, by a curious inversion of the processes of nature, they may become the half-comatose and purblind chrysalides which too many of us poor creatures so ruefully resemble. They are not bound in by their groping senses. Facts to them are the liveliest of chameleons. Between their dream and their reality looms no impassable abyss. There is no solitude more secluded than a child's, no absorption more complete, no insight more exquisite and, one might even add, more comprehensive."

And, further, he says:

"We speak indulgently of childish make-believe, childish fancy. Bret Harte was nearer

the truth when he maintained that 'the dominant expression of a child is gravity.' The cold fact is that few of us have the energy to be serious at their pitch. There runs a jingle :

“ ‘ O whither go all the nights and days ?  
And where can to-morrow be ?  
Is any one there when I'm not there ?  
And why am I always me ? ’ ”

“ With such metaphysical riddles—which no philosopher has yet answered to anybody's but his own entire satisfaction—children entertain the waking moments of their inward reverie. They are contemplatives, solitaires, fairies, who sink again and again out of the noise and fever of existence into a waking vision. We can approach them only by way of intuition and remembrance, only by becoming even as one of them ; though there are many books—Sully's *Studies of Childhood*, for instance, Mr. Gosse's *Father and Son*, John Ruskin's *Præterita*, Serge Aksakoff's *Years of Childhood*, Henry James's *A Small Boy*, and others—which will be a really vivid and quiet help in times of difficulty.”

Having employed the classification “for illustration and convenience,” we are quickly aware of the places where it is a misfit. To begin with, the writing of such an essay was the work of an adult mind highly self-conscious

and of unusual profundity. Profundity, however, is the quality which might have been expected, for it is inherent in the child-mind and in dream-thinking. What is not postulated by the term "poet of childhood" is this power of sudden reversal of the mental process from immediate imaginative perception to a philosophical mood in which the poetic fragments are gathered together into a contemplative vision. The change can be seen in operation in *The Memoirs of a Midget*; but, as will be found, when this occurs a transition is being effected from one broad division of the poet's work to another, from his dream-thought to what may be called his criticism of life, which in his case happens to be romantic in tone. The one voices the nostalgia of the fabled Paradise of mankind; the other hankers after a more accessible human past and is founded largely upon biographical history. It is an attempt to focus human destiny through the many-phased lens of dramatic fiction. No doubt also it provides fuller and more satisfactory scope for the relation-forming intellect of the mature artist. The emotional stimulus alone remains that of the eternal child in human nature.

## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHY

Descent from Huguenots ; and from Robert Browning—St. Paul's Cathedral School—Editorship of *The Choristers' Journal*—Earliest Compositions—Clerking in the City—Literary First-fruits.

WALTER JOHN DE LA MARE was born on 25th April 1873, at the little Kentish village of Charlton. His father, James Edward Delamare, was churchwarden and brother to the Rev. Abraham Delamare, rector of St. Thomas's, Woolwich. Walter's mother, Lucy Sophia, was the daughter of Dr. Colin Arrot Browning, naval surgeon at Woolwich Dockyard, contemporaneously with the presence in Woolwich of the Delamares.

Dr. Colin Arrot Browning was a remarkable man who crowned his career as a naval surgeon by reforming the method of treating wretched passengers on board convict ships bound for Australia. In 1842 he published a book, *England's Exiles*, and the next year another entitled



*The Convict Ship*, and they were both republished in one volume. They contain a lively, if very didactic, account of the pious and humane old surgeon's method of appealing to that "god in the germ" which he knew existed in the breast of even convicts. By eloquent sermons, scriptural lessons which combined pious exhortation with common-sense argument and a stimulus to the idle minds of the poor prisoners, he so transformed their outlook and attitude towards authority that he was finally able to dispense with the degrading system of confinement in irons and to give the convicts freedom of movement on board ship. It was after retirement from the sea that he became surgeon to the Dockyard.

Dr. Browning appears to have found ample scope for his humanitarian zeal amongst the poor of the old Woolwich Dockyard, and was closely associated with the Naval Chaplain, a Mr. James Conolly. Mr. Conolly's daughter, Jane, was a bridesmaid at the wedding of Walter de la Mare's mother and father. This fortunate happening causes the inclusion of some observations very pertinent to the present theme in a remarkably interesting book which Jane Conolly wrote, entitled *Old Days and Ways*, and published in 1912 with Edward Arnold & Co. The

book sets out to trace the eventful and distinguished history of the Conolly family. When Jane Conolly reaches the nineteenth century her story more or less settles down at Charlton and at Woolwich, where her father was the Dockyard Chaplain.

“ Dr. Suther, Dockyard doctor,” says Jane Conolly, “ was succeeded by Dr. Colin Browning. He and my father understood this much in ameliorating the condition of convicts under the old terrible system. How well do I remember their saying again and again—‘ While there’s life there’s hope ! ’ ‘ The unfortunate men should have a chance.’ Dr. Browning was some distant relation of the Brownings at Hatcham, who came occasionally on Sundays to see them. I can well recall two rather short stout women in old-fashioned peaked shawls rather hustled away by Mrs. Browning, who did not feel that these relations did her honour. With the changes of time, one family has slipped away, while the family of Robert Browning will always be remembered.” <sup>1</sup>

That is a tantalisingly meagre account which ought to be followed up by an expert genealogist, but it seemed valuable enough for inclusion here. Jane Conolly in her book reveals herself

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B.

as a vivid and painstaking historian of her family, and convinces the reader that a remark like the above, of such moment to us, would not have been made without a firm foundation of fact. It is possible to feel a certain mental affinity as well as opposition in the work of Walter de la Mare and Robert Browning, and since the discovery I have been pleased to recognise a distinct facial resemblance in the two poets. Another remarkable coincidence, which, however, concerns only the Conolly family, is that a Dr. John Conolly was first cousin of George Tennyson, the grandfather of Alfred Tennyson, the poet.

Dr. Colin Arrot Browning's father—and the poet's great-grandfather—was a minister at Arbroath, who could trace his descent from that Robertson who was Dr. Johnson's friend. Thus his mother's family, who lived at Sevenoaks in the latter part of last century, besides a connection with Robert Browning, were able to trace an old Scottish ancestry. His father's family, the Delamares, were of Huguenot descent, and owing to the courtesy of Mr. de la Mare I have seen the genealogy of the Delamares from Nicholas Delamare, the father of the Jean Baptiste Delamare who arrived in England in October 1730. Admirers of *The Return* will be interested

to know of Mr. de la Mare's descent from this old Huguenot family, if only because of the author's interest in Huguenots. Nicholas Sabathier of course was "French evidently; probably Huguenot," as all readers of chapter one are aware. The similarity of Christian names is, however, fortuitous.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Conolly, who unfortunately died a few years ago, and can never supplement her precious record, also refers to a "Miss Delamare," sister of the Rev. Abraham Delamare at Woolwich, and therefore the poet's aunt. Miss Conolly is recalling stories of a delightful Mrs. Bobean, a lady who was a past-master in the gentle art of begging. Every one knew her little ways in the Dockyard, but few could resist her wiles. Mrs. Bobean one day called at the house of the Chaplain and confessed to Miss Conolly that she had already called at Mr. Delamare's house, finding only a lady at home. It was "Miss Delamere, his sister," says the incorrigible picker-up of unconsidered trifles, "and I showed her my petticoat. I said a petticoat like mine could not be shown to Mr. Delamere and him a bachelor, and she said, 'Certainly not. Quite right, Mrs. Bobean,' and she gave me a good petticoat and half a crown. The petticoat was a good one,

<sup>1</sup> I have the author's authority for saying this.

because I put it away for two-and-six directly after."

Walter de la Mare was sent to St. Paul's Cathedral School for his education, and while a scholar there he founded, at the age of sixteen, in September 1889, *The Choristers' Journal*, the school magazine, which is still flourishing. The first six months' career of this excellent example of school journalism must have cost the devoted founder herculean efforts. It was jelly-graphed and published weekly at the beginning. De la Mare's pen seems to have provided the major portion of the contents during that critical first half-year, though five editors sign a "Notice to Subscribers to *The Choristers' Journal*." The "Notice" is worth reproducing :

"As it has been evident to all our readers and subscribers that, within the past few weeks, the printing of the above-named *Journal* has not been at all satisfactory, and even sometimes quite illegible, the Editors do not think it fair to our kind readers that they should pay for a paper that they cannot read. With this in view, they have consulted with the chief supporters of the said *Journal* to make some alteration, and naturally, the first impulse was to get it printed, but, they found, as every one is well



aware, that printing is a very expensive luxury, and they were almost giving it up in despair, when it was proposed to try the printers with whom the Cathedral have dealings, and to our great surprise found it just within our limits.

“Of course this necessitates great change, and the following are the principal :

*The Choristers' Journal* will come out once a month.

The cost monthly will be fourpence each.

The only subscription will be 4s. 6d. (a little more)—a half-year.

For those subscribers to whom the *Journal* is to be posted the subscriptions annually will be 5s. (allowing for free postage).

Subscribers who wish to continue their subscriptions will please subtract the money which we still owe them for *Journals*,

And send us in the remainder.

“We hope that all our former readers will still continue their kind support.

<i>Editors</i>	{	W. J. DE LA MARE.
		A. E. CLAXTON.
		H. LETT.
		J. A. BOUQUET.
		C. E. READ.”

When I visited the fine old choir school recently, at the corner of Dean's Yard and Carter Lane, opposite to the famous Wardrobe Court

the present headmaster, Mr. R. H. Couchman, who has been in charge for nine years, left me a whole day poring over the first of the numerous volumes, now bound in leather, of *The Choristers' Journal*. Of De la Mare's original co-editors, he told me, three are now parsons and Mr. Lett is a surgeon.

As the "Notice to Subscribers" foretold, the *Journal* was to appear in print, and No. 10, dated April 1890, is the first of these. But under "School Chat" we learn: "De la Mare, the boy who first thought of *The Choristers' Journal*, is, we are sorry to say, left."

But the reader will expect to hear more about those first nine numbers which laid the foundation of such a journalistic triumph.

The title-page of No. 1, written in ink by Bouquet, runs thus :

*CHORISTERS' JOURNAL.*

NO. 1. SEPTEMBER 24, 1889. PRICE 1d.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY.

THE paper will be published every Tuesday at 5 p.m., and all correspondence must be sent in before 6 p.m. on Fridays, and must be put in the first shelf of the cupboard under No. 2 Locker, and must be marked in the right-hand corner whether Joke, Question, etc., and be signed with full name and then either initials or *nomme-de-plume* beneath.

The Editors lose no time in coming to grips with the practical requirements of popular journalism. Following the above very business-like notice, appears :

We have the pleasure of announcing a

#### PUZZLE COMPETITION,

with a prize of sixpence to the person who may first be successful in putting "twelve pieces of money in 6 rows of 4 each in each row." (Diagrams of puzzle to be sent enclosed in envelope.)

Notice the cautious provision of "first," at once a stimulus to expedition and a safeguard against a superfluity of prize-winners.

There is also a "Junior Competition with a prize of twopence (to any one below the third class)."

This first number indeed reveals no lack of editorial initiative. Under "Correspondence" a hare is started in true Fleet Street style—"Which is the best game, Cricket or Football?"

And in the "Answers to Correspondents" some one designated "D.," which we can only hope is the Editor-poet, answering his own question, is told :

1. A very good toffee may be made with the following ingredients—(Treacle), Butter and Sugar, flavoured with vanella (*sic*), lemon or cocoanut,

according to taste. Cool till the mixture boils (*sic*) (which seems to be a "misprint").

2. We think the ferrous-oxalate and pyrogallic acid developers are the best for amateurs. Ferrous-oxalate to consist of :

A. Oxalate of potash	.	.	.	1 oz.
Water	.	.	.	4 „

B. Protosulphate of iron	.	.	.	1 oz.
Water	.	.	.	6 „

For each ounce of *B.* add one minim of sulphurous acid.

In the "Advertisements" (Oh yes, there are *Ad's* in *The Choristers' Journal*!) appears this striking "display" :

STAMPS ! STAMPS !! STAMPS !!!

Keep your money till De la Mare gets his superb duplicate collection.

To be sold at ruinous prices.

This is followed by :

Will boys go in for a raffle for a Shilling Pantograph at 2d. each?—All answers to be addressed to J. A. B., No. 13 Locker.

Then yet another editor's advertisement (for J. A. B., we fear, is J. A. Bouquet, and A. E. C. is A. E. Clayton) :

If any one finds a small screw pencil and returns it to A. E. C., No. 14, he will be rewarded.

No. 2 of *The Choristers' Journal* bears the motto "Excelsior," which it has retained to this day; but a word must be spared for another contribution to No. 1. This is a "Preface" by the Rev. W. Russell, M.A., the headmaster, in which he says:

"A new journal must of course commence its career by an apology for its existence, and *The Choristers' Journal* does not venture to depart from this time-honoured custom or to rear its little head at the great big world without a word of introduction. *Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, be tranquil. *The Choristers' Journal* has no intention of attempting to rival you. Its object is simply to record some of the little events which are of special interest in its little world. And although this little world consists of no more than about forty heads, it is found by daily experience that our forty heads supply forty tongues with a copious flowery utterance resulting—it must be confessed occasionally, in a good deal of clatter. But as it is thought that so much intellect and eloquence ought not to waste itself in mere vibration, *The Choristers' Journal* hopes to collect such fragments of this and other matters of common interest as kind friends may supply, and present them to the world in a more permanent form.

"Who knows that this little world may not be



*nourishing in it an incipient Sir Walter Scott or a Lord Macaulay.* If there be such, the pages of our *Journal* will give him an opportunity of proving his metal. . . .”

The headmaster could hardly have guessed the accuracy of his random shot, or that it would, as regards the quality of the incipient genius, actually fall short of reality.

In the same number appears an editorial note :

“ There has been given to the school library a book called *Gulliver's Travels*. This is a most charming and interesting book and one suitable to boys of all ages, and we recommend everybody to read it.”

Little doubt that at least one of the Editors read this “ charming and interesting book.” The section of *Henry Brocken* in which the hero reaches the land of the Houyhnhnms is one of the most perfect translations of a dream in the whole of English literature, and proves how vividly Walter de la Mare's imagination had experienced the sombre brilliance of the morose mind of Swift, who yet was the author also of the *Rhapsody of Poetry*.

“ Rhapsody ” brings us back to *The Choristers'*

*Journal*, in the second number of which appears anonymously the following :

## LYRICAL RHAPSODY

“ Here they are the children  
Of the big blue dome,  
All agog to utter  
Thoughts that go and come.

Gray old frowsy fogies  
Try to make a noise  
By writing in the paper.  
Why not then the boys ?

Why should only old blokes  
Wield the pen and ink ;  
Why should not the young folks  
Tell us what they think ?

Must your head be hairless  
Ere you're fit to spout ;  
Must your mouth be shut until  
Your teeth have fallen out ?

No ! let Deans and Canons  
Write their fusty books ;  
Cawing there, and croaking  
Like a pack of rooks.

Our young brains are teeming  
With words as good as theirs,  
Our young heads are steaming  
With thoughts too deep for tears.

Out then with our stilo !  
Give us each a pen,  
We can do the business  
Quite as well as men !

Let those ancient fogies  
See what we can do,  
While our chins are hairless,  
While our souls are new !  
  
While we're in a glitter  
How on earth to spell  
All we want to utter,  
All we've got to tell !  
  
Hurrah ! for the Cathedral,  
And three cheers for the Dean,  
For here's the second number  
Of the Boy's Own Magazine.  
  
GOD SAVE THE QUEEN."<sup>1</sup>

It is not possible to resist adding one more advertisement. This follows the "Lyrical Rhapsody" :

"What is the world gaping at ?

"Why, don't you know ? At De la Mare's marvellously low-priced sheet of rare foreign stamps, of course.

"We can't conceive missing this opportunity to be possible. . . ."

There should no longer be any question about the practical ability of the poetic mind !

In subsequent numbers of *The Choristers' Journal* appear many things which had to be excluded here solely because the contents of this book are not confined to Walter de la Mare's

<sup>1</sup> Mr. de la Mare thinks that Canon Scott Holland wrote this "Rhapsody."

schooldays. There are at least two stories, however, signed "W. J. D."—one entitled "Powder-Monkey Bob," which shows a promising gift for story-telling, and "A Moonlight Skate," a vivid piece of description of a stay at a "château in Russia," in which a fair lady and a madman provide plenty of thrills. There is also a serial story called "A Race for Life," a dream-vision of a Druid sacrifice, which is unsigned, but seems to bear its author's identity in the dream-effect of the swiftly moving imagery. Mr. de la Mare is very doubtful of the authorship. Here, again, the narrator is a kind of knight-errant who sees a beautiful girl being sacrificed by the pagan priests, and, he says, "my blood boiled with fury" at the sight. He awakens from his dream to find a white cat staring at him in the study where he had fallen asleep over Enoch Spratt's *History of the Druids*. The author was then not yet seventeen.

He had in an earlier number written this thoroughly boyish note which we must assume was composed for the excellent editorial purpose of stimulating correspondence; and this it certainly did:

"A girl always pretends she thinks boys utterly below her in everything. She also thinks

that a boy is not worth speaking to but is only meant to assist her in every possible way, but girls have some good qualities for all that, for most of them are generous and very nice when you have trouble to confide in. Of course now I'm speaking mostly of a sister for, of course, I haven't said much about a girl who is not a sister for I have not yet had much experience (of sweethearts, which no doubt are very nice indeed) but I think that girls especially if they are pretty are not so very bad on the whole (W. J. D.)."

There follows this terrific onslaught on the sex, which unfortunately is unsigned :

#### " CORRESPONDENCE

" Girls are thought too much of in these enlightened times and ought to be put down to a lower place in the eyes of people.

" Girls, are, in my opinion, divided into three classes, viz. : (1) Under twelve years of age, (2) between twelve and seventeen, (3) over seventeen. The first class is decidedly the best and girls of this class do not expect compliments but are very fond of doing little services for you and playing with you. But the girls of Class 2 are just the opposite, they expect compliments from everybody and think you rude if you do not slave for them, and girls of this class spend about three hours a day before a looking-glass.



The third class are worst of all and every one in his right mind ought to be careful of these. As for good-looking girls, they are so rare, that I look upon them as myths, but girls of all ages are a fraud and deceivers ever.

“ (*Notice*).—Will not some of our lady readers stick up for themselves after this letter, for we *suppose* they were once girls.”

It is a pleasure to record that the Editors were fairly inundated with brilliant defences of the outraged sex by “lady readers.”

Another “notice” follows, that the *Journal* is to appear fortnightly in future as its production occupies nearly all the playtime of the Editors !

The surprising thing is that after Walter de la Mare left the school at Easter, 1890, aged seventeen, to enter the City Office of the Anglo-American Oil Company, he kept his job there for eighteen years. The branch at which he worked has been moved to St. James’s Park. When he left he was in the statistics department, a veritable morass of figures. “I think one can find an interest in any task which has *got* to be done,” he answered, when I asked him if he did not find his work at that time distasteful. It is not without significance that in the old school registers at

St. Paul's, his name is top of the school in Class 1 for the three terms before he left, and among the first three or four scholars for many years preceding his attainment of the premier position. Even the strenuous founding, editing, printing, and publishing of the school *Journal* was not allowed to interfere with conscientious study.

He might have gone into the Bank of England when he went into the "City," but heard that "Oil" was better. In 1908 the Asquith Government of that day, to its great credit, largely I believe due to Sir Henry Newbolt's recommendations, made him a small grant and subsequently put him on the Civil List for a pension of £100 a year, which, with a little periodical literary work, enabled him to devote all his energies to writing.

His first published work had, however, appeared many years earlier, indeed only five years after he left school, which proves that the young contributor to *The Choristers' Journal* had not abandoned his artistic ambition; had not even ceased to cultivate his amazing gift. In 1895 a short story called "Kismet" appeared in *The Sketch*, and in the following year *The Cornhill*, which had just come under the editorship of Mr. St. Loe Strachey, began to print his work.

"Kismet," which appeared in the *Sketch*

Series entitled *A Novel in a Nutshell*, is a neatly told story of about two thousand words, signed Walter Ramal. Only in momentary gleams does the author's power appear of charging words with a quality of revelation, but the narration keeps a firm grip on the reader's attention up to the climax. The *outré* plot is made convincing from the opening :

“ The man in the cart, when he reached the top of the long hill up which the old mare had been steadily plodding, was rejoiced to spy, against the whiteness of the road beyond, the figure of a man walking.”

The man in the cart was an undertaker, the pedestrian a sailor coming home unannounced, glorying in the pleasant surprise he would give his wife. He accepts a lift and a seat in the cart. Dismounts when approaching the village of Barrowmere, making his way on foot to his home, where he finds, with uneasy feelings, the cart he had just been sitting in. The only light in the silent house shines from the window of his wife's bedroom. Reluctantly he climbs along a tree branch to gaze into that window. He sees the white shrouded bed, the face of his dead wife, and the driver of the cart “ pass across the rift between the curtains carrying the coffin on which he had sat in his joyous ride

to his home." Dazed, he slips from the frosty branch, and "in his struggling flight through the air his skull struck and cracked against a bossy branch; his body turned limply, and fell with a dead thud, broken and lifeless, upon the turf beneath."

Undoubtedly Mr. de la Mare has lost a lot of money by being born a poet.

Mr. St. Loe Strachey in "The Adventure of Living" (chapter xv., *The Cornhill*), after describing the editorial discovery of Frank Bullen, says:

"The discovery of Bullen was always a pleasure, but still greater was my delight in the discovery of one who, I may now say without exaggeration, has become one of the leading men of letters of our time. The author I mean is Mr. Walter de la Mare. My friend Mr. Ingpen, who was then on the staff of Smith & Elder, and was detailed to help me in getting up and getting out *The Cornhill*, came to me, after I had been in office for about three weeks, and asked me whether as a personal favour I would look at an article by a relation of his called De la Mare, a youth who was then on the staff of a business house in the City, but who had literary leanings and was married to Mr. Ingpen's sister. I told him that I should, of course, be delighted, but that I had outrun the constable

terribly in the way of accepting MSS. as he knew, for he wrote most of the letters of acceptance. I was afraid, therefore, that however good his brother-in-law's work, I could give only one verdict. But he told me that he fully realised the situation, but that he would be glad if I would read the MS. all the same, and tell him what I thought of it.

"Accordingly I stuck the MS. in my pocket. With a certain feeling of dread that I might be forced to accept it, I took it out on the following Sunday, . . . and began to read it. I shall never forget my delight. . . . When I laid down Mr. de la Mare's MS.—signed *Walter Ramal*, an anagram of De la Mare—I am proud to say I fully realised that a new planet had swum into my ken. I had had the good luck to be a literary astronomer first to recognise that the Host of Heaven had another recruit. That is an experience as thrilling as it is rare. The story was entitled 'A Mote.' . . ."

Mr. Strachey then quotes his editorial note to the story, of which he may well feel proud to-day for its bold enthusiasm, if not for its absolute justice :

"All those who hold the doctrine of transmigration will hardly fail, after they have read this story, to think that the spirit of Edgar Allan Poe is once more abroad.—EDITOR, *Cornhill*."



Mr. Strachey stresses the fact that in the eighteen-nineties work like "A Mote" was rare, that Stevenson was at his best and so was Kipling, but no trace of influence of either could be seen in De la Mare's prose. "The occasional appearances of the De Quincey manner were in truth only examples of common origin."

De la Mare's next contribution to *The Cornhill*, "The Village of Old Age," was a phantasy, but, says Mr. Strachey, "Good as were these two essays, they were nothing to De la Mare's marvellous story, 'The Moon's Miracle,' which appeared in a later number."

"The Moon's Miracle" also is signed Walter Ramal, and appears in *The Cornhill* for April 1897. The young writer was then twenty-four. Mr. Strachey prefaced the story with a quotation from Book II. of *Paradise Lost*, which pointed to his sympathetic appreciation of the multitudinous imagery of the prose which followed.

"As when to warn proud cities war appears  
Waged in the troubled sky, and armies rush  
To battle in the clouds; before each van  
Prick forth the aery knights and couch their spears  
Till thickest legions close; with feats of arms  
From either end of heaven the welkin burns."

And the following synopsis :

"How the Count saw a city in the sky and

men in harness issuing thereout—Of the encampment of the host of the moonsmen—Of how the battle was gained—The Count's great joy thereat and of how the fight sped."

The story opens in a manner as surprising as that of "A Mote."

"A Mote" began :

"I awoke from a dream of a gruesome fight with a giant geranium. I surveyed with drowsy satisfaction and complacency the eccentric jogs and jerks of my aunt's head."

But neither the giant geranium nor the aunt's head have any vital connection with the subsequent horrible story, and this opening is a deft trick from which De la Mare's later stories are entirely free. The opening of "The Moon's Miracle" is surprising only because of the synopsis. The story begins :

"The Housekeeper's matronly skirts had sounded upon the staircase. The maids had simpered their timid 'Good-night, sir,' and were to bed. Nevertheless, the Count still sat imperturbable and silent. A silence of frowns, of eloquence on the simmer : a silence that was almost a menace."

The manner in which the story suddenly launches into the vivid reality of dream recalls that early exercise in *The Choristers' Journal*, "A Race for Life," and both stories seem to be influenced by Poe's "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains."

A rhapsody of the Count for the benefit of his young friend is suddenly cut short.

"We stood agape at the window.

"The North-West brought it forth. . . . The intense stillness of the city's surreption of the night-sky for a while assured me of its unreality ; but soon it was impossible so to think. Out of space the city had risen upon us. Out of the night she sallied forth like a bride. . . .

" 'The silence is like a wary beast,' said the Count. 'D'ye think, is it the dust of the air (my eyes are dim), or do I see men moving upon the ramparts and busy about the gates? That pinnacle grows clearer every minute ; it pricks the sky. Really it is very odd. What? what says the boy? And yet, mark you, not an inch of it is moonlit. Some inner light glimmers upon the stone, or a sister moon is prowling in her rear.' 'Men, men!' said I. Very slowly the world's circumference dipped in the sky until the city hung free of all earthly excrescences as though she were swinging by a cord, as swings a seagull, out of space. Like a huge, still summer

cloud lazily lolling on the horizon near before sunset was the city, save that upon her walls and buildings was the light of a wintry dawn fluttering."

Thenceforward, the language moves with a music, a rhythm, beauty of image that Edgar Allen Poe never equalled at his best. A little group of watchers behold the dramatic preparations for a battle in the sky. Every move of two opposing armies in that mysterious vision is a step towards the dramatic climax.

"Now the last moment was come. My heart stood still in panic expectancy. Even the Count henceforward held his peace; even things inanimate seemed to bow beneath the burden of the silence; and the trees crouched under the moving skies like huddled beasts at the thunder. All sudden the blood gushed warm in my body. All sudden a weltering wave of horsemen rocked against the stars. Then the armies of the sky met.

"Now at full speed, in silence, the nightmen swept down upon the moonsmen, surging in their onslaught almost within touch of the moon. Now steadily with grim stubbornness, in silence of deep seas, the moonsmen drove back their assailants, and falling and leaping, leaping and falling, regained their magic circle. The sky

was rimples over with galloping horsemen as foam rides in on wind-beaten waves. The spark-spitting hoofs, the pulse of moonlit wings, the fury of brandished weapons, though without sound, rang in my inward ears. All this night the moon wended her steep way in a girdle of glittering warriors.

“Albeit here was the very acme of battle, yet to me the outlying troops of horsemen far down in the heavens until they almost grazed roof were more entrancing. Sometimes in one of these petty fights most ingenious tactics were evident. Like falcon and heron, two would flutter, swoop, hover, fall; in a trice, without a sound. Such a duel as this took place immediately above our heads. Even the woman, seated upon the Count’s macintosh, left her wailing and thereafter gave little rest to her small, quick eyes.

“Now a vehement squadron sped higher, highmost until the sight yearned in vain. Now a luckless horseman in the full heat of fight fell like a meteor into our unfriendly air and silently, like a meteor, disappeared. Fleet soaring skirmishers, slow compact regiments, disarrayed frenzied fugitives, hither and thither, to and fro, put out the stars and filled the air with lightnings. Without sound, undaunted and more gloriously ablaze in their swift decadence, a thousand fell out of silence into nothingness. And if a legion in grim magnificence should in its tactics droop



from on high to within some few spire-lengths of the earth, then a giant shadow would sweep the moonbeams from the dewy grass, and would transiently dull the glitter of the Count's round eyes. I noticed also, more than once, that at some extreme point of vantage the troops would muster innumerable until like a wolf-harried flock, a tangled tumultuous mass would rear itself fantastically upon the horizon, and ere long, trembling, would sink out of sight."

Truly a marvel to be seen at night in Wimbledon, for such was the Count's locality. What surprises not less than the beauty of the narration is the writer's assured manipulation of the storyteller's tools. Every device of dramatic comment and incongruous contrast of life-like incidents is brought in to furnish the semblance of plot where no plot is except the image-sequences of a dream. One may ask why this superb piece of work was excluded from *The Riddle and Other Stories*, and wonder at the creative fertility of the artist who could afford such an omission.

Walter de la Mare's first book to be published was his *Songs of Childhood*. It appeared in 1901, and was signed Walter Ramal. At the time Andrew Lang was reader for the firm of Longmans, and the poet retains pleasant memories of that first publication. Dicky Doyle,

the designer of the title-page of *Punch*, had done a watercolour which he gave to Sir Charles Longman, who lent this to the author for his book and offered him a choice of bindings. It is not often that an author's first appearance is treated so considerately. Andrew Lang then reviewed the book generously in his "At the Sign of the Ship" monthly causerie in *Longman's Magazine* for March 1902. After speaking of the increasing aversion to new poetry which "is a distinct and well-recognised symptom of old age," he expresses a pleasant anticipation of reading Stephen Phillips's *Ulysses*, of which he has seen only an extract. He continues :

"New verses which do not find me all of stone are Mr. Walter Ramal's *Songs of Childhood* (Longmans). The book is not exactly aimed at the nursery, though a few of the pieces, 'The Fly,' 'The Silver Penny,' 'Bunches of Grapes,' 'The Hare,' and several others, seem to me almost as likely to please even little children as the old favourites, the traditional nursery rhymes. Try 'The Buckle': it is like the vague reverie of our childhood long ago, when we possessed the secret that we have lost, and shall never find again, 'the key of the happy golden land.' "

Lang then quotes "The Buckle" in full, and continues :

“ ‘ Reverie ’ is another favourite, and ‘ Love-locks ’ and ‘ Tartary,’ and, perhaps above all, ‘ The Three Beggars.’ One would gladly quote them all. Mr. Ramal, with some technical defects easily remedied, has what Charles Lamb calls ‘ a fairy way of writing.’ It is less what he says than what his verse suggests that delights us. How does the verse suggest more than it says? By the mere circumstance that it really is poetry. Mr. Ramal has something of the secret of Keats’s ‘ La Belle Dame Sans Merci.’ This must sound like exaggeration; one can only say that the verses affect one thus. On another reader they may produce no such effect, he may be out of tune with their music, as I may be in no ‘ pre-established harmony ’ with the poetry that pleases him. One can only advise readers fond of poetry to give that of Mr. Ramal a chance.”

This was still six years before the poet was to leave the daily routine of an office. When in 1908 he took to freelance literary work to meet the practical necessities of existence, “ reviewing was the branch of this trade to which De la Mare devoted himself, and his reviews in the *Saturday Westminster*, *Bookman*, *Times Literary Supplement*, and elsewhere, clothed so fine a critical faculty in the distinction of style which betrays his hand in all he has written that . . . his work

could be identified by the discerning as easily as can the characteristic, unsigned paintings of a master." <sup>1</sup>

He did not ever enjoy reviewing and gave it up as soon as circumstances permitted, but that excellence of his work noted by the editor of the *Bookman* is entirely characteristic. In passing on to the poetry and prose which had been brought already to so high a level of excellence before he ceased to work as a clerk every day in a city office, it is just that stress should be laid upon the conscientious craftsmanship and industry which laid the foundations of a reputation so solid and well-based. The poet was nearly thirty before the publication of his first book, and thirty-five before taking up letters as a profession. What stern self-control and determined direction of strong desire must this young man have possessed! Walter de la Mare's life after leaving school, in tight-lipped effort and quiet courage, must have been worthy to compare with the noble story of Charles Lamb. But the India Office was probably a better refuge for Lamb than the business-like office of the Anglo-American Oil Company must have been for De la Mare. At least one of his admirers

<sup>1</sup> *Gods of Modern Grub Street: Walter de la Mare*, by A. St. John Adcock.

finds inspiration in contemplating that eighteen years of service in a city office—eighteen years' deliberate concentration on uncongenial routine, from which the poet's mind must continually have fled into dreams, weaving the spell of his poetry out of a hungry inner self. One is reminded of the John Keats, who was an apothecary's assistant and then a student of surgery, working in the East London Hospital but beholding flights of fairies in the sunlight that streamed through the windows. In imaginative sympathy with other congenial and noble spirits in English literature also, De la Mare resembles Lamb and Keats. There has always been, however, in him a quality distinctly his own, which may be traced to his ancestry. It is the strong self-control and sanity which may be an inheritance from these old Huguenots or from the Brownings. Probably it is something from both which mingles in him, the craftsman's conscience coming from the Huguenots and the deeply moral attitude to life from the Brownings. One of Walter de la Mare's forbears, the Peter who was born in 1769, was head of a firm of silk weavers in Spitalfields. The Huguenots had brought this industry to England, and "Spitalfields silk" is still as winning an inducement to buy as Witney blankets, or Brussels sprouts!



The pride in their craft shown by that splendid old firm created mysteriously "out of a mouthful of air," "Lispet, Lispett and Vaine," may perhaps not unreasonably be found behind the artistry of the modern poet. And as for the religious instinct, perhaps no less an attribute of the Huguenot Delamares than of the theological Brownings, that is found many times in the poet's work and underlies it all. Nowhere will this side of him be seen more explicit, however, than in his sonnets, particularly the sonnet entitled "Virtue." It is a poem of one who could wish for no finer epitaph than the character of a virtuous man, a man of character and conscience.

## CHAPTER III

### POETRY OF CHILDHOOD

*Songs of Childhood—Peacock Pie—Down-a-Down Derry—The Child's Imagination—Henry Brocken—Dramatic Power—Crossings—The Three Mulla-Mulgars—Transition to Adult Vision.*

WALTER DE LA MARE'S poetry of childhood is to be found in the prose of *Henry Brocken* and *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* and in much of his verse besides that of the *Songs of Childhood* and *Peacock Pie*. Confronted with it, a critic is unable to find any parallel in literature. Its contents are too rich, varied, complex. One may recall the Christina Rossetti of *Sing-Song* :

“Where innocent bright-eyed daisies are,  
With blades of grass between,  
Each daisy stands up like a star  
Out of a sky of green”;

but this is not genuine poetry of childhood. She is better in this :

“Sing me a song—  
What shall I sing ?

Three merry sisters  
Dancing in a ring,  
Light and fleet upon their feet  
As birds upon the wing."

*Sing-Song* and *The Child's Garden of Verses* might provoke the epithet "charming."

Blake's *Songs of Innocence* are not guilty of being "charming"; they wonderfully appear to be artless:

"Pretty Joy!  
Sweet Joy, but two days old.  
Sweet Joy I call thee:  
Thou dost smile,  
I sing the while,  
Sweet Joy befall thee!"

They are also perfectly musical. But in all these, and in his *Songs of Experience*, when he is not following the lure of a mystical philosophy, Blake is childlike without really writing poetry of childhood, even if he is secure from the suspicion of producing work more simple than the mind which conceived it. Christina Rossetti and Stevenson are not merely open to this charge: they stand condemned; which is not, of course, to say that we could afford to lose their delightful work. But the child does not play at being a child. It is serious, like the artist. *A Child's*

*Garden of Verses* is not serious ; it is whimsical, tender, wistful.

“ Now with my little gun I crawl  
All in the dark along the wall,  
And follow round the forest track  
Away behind the sofa back.”

Who ever heard a child think of “ sofa back,” when most obviously it was a forest track ? No piece in Stevenson’s book is better than “ Historical Associations,” where there is room for his essentially romantic thought-associations. When he says that “ this garden ground ”

“ Has seen immortal actions done,  
And valiant battles lost and won,”

he has struck the path that Kipling followed in *Puck of Pook’s Hill*, and he is so good at times that he inspires De la Mare :

“ On we rode, the others and I,  
Over the mountains blue, and by  
The Silver River, the sounding sea,  
And the robber woods of Tartary.”

But he is not as serious even as Kipling, another poet of childhood. He ends “ Historical Associations ” :

“ Last we drew rein—a weary three—  
Upon the lawn, in time for tea,  
And from our steeds alighted down  
Before the gates of Babylon.”

The child never consciously mixes up romance and reality like that. It has forgotten all about the gates of Babylon when tea is in sight. Its concentration is too whole-hearted for a half-cynical sentimentalising.

The particular virtue of De la Mare as a poet of childhood is that he can remain himself, the artist, the thinker of primitive phantasy, the epicure in pleasing imagery and wistful inconsequence. The reader does not feel that

“ He has grown up and gone away,  
And it is but a child of air  
That lingers in the garden there,”

but that the child in him is the child in us. In a characteristic poem, of *Songs of Childhood* he writes :

“ If I were Lord of Tartary,  
Myself and me alone,  
My bed should be of ivory,  
Of beaten gold my throne ;  
And in my courts should peacocks flaunt,  
And in my forests tigers haunt,  
And in my pools great fishes slant  
Their fins athwart the sun.”

He'd have trumpets summon him to meals, and in the evening lamps shining “ yellow as honey, red as wine,” and the music of “ harp and mandoline.” He'd wear a robe of beads as “ small and thick



as seeds," and a car drawn by "zebras seven" should take him "through Tartary's dark glades." The child is intoxicated by his own imagination :

" Lord of the fruits of Tartary,  
Her rivers silver-pale !  
Lord of the hills of Tartary,  
Glen, thicket, wood, and dale !  
Her flashing stars, her scented breeze,  
Her trembling lakes, like foamless seas,  
Her bird-delighting citron-trees  
In every purple vale ! "

This is the delightful, childish inconsequence of the poetic faculty. In another poem belonging to the same collection, "The Fairies Dancing," he hears the fairies sing as they dance, while the "starlight shook as if with sound," till, with the first flush of dawn, they die away :

" And dim from moonlit dreams awoke  
The towers and groves of Arroar."

Thanks to Mr. W. B. Yeats, fairies are creatures which even sensible people may almost "believe in," but the wonders of Tartary, the towers and groves of Arroar, and all the other marvellous things the poet sings about as if he knows that we have heard of them before, appeal to the primitive simplicity of mind which we had well-nigh lost, and which belongs to the age of gold. In the mood of *Songs of Childhood* and *Peacock*

*Pie* the poet can say almost anything that springs up into his consciousness ; we believe. Look again at the first stanza of "Tartary." You could not possibly foretell those "great fishes," after tigers and peacocks, and certainly the genius of the language which makes "slant" a pleasing rhyme with "haunt" and "flaunt" took hold of the poet's pen to give us the delight of seeing the fishes' fins also, "athwart the sun." Every stray impression is food to the poet's imagination, as it was to another famous Cockney—Keats ; and I daresay we shall not be too wildly wrong to suppose the fishes of Tartary live in the pool at Hampton Court !

Another element in this type of poetry is the inventiveness as distinguished from the imaginative creation. With many exceptions, delightful as they all are, the *Songs of Childhood*, the unique book of rhymes entitled *A Child's Day*, and those in *Peacock Pie* and *Down-a-Down Derry* are more inventive than creative, and therefore they are not the finest poetry of Mr. de la Mare, although the rarity of such work done so perfectly will alone give them an important place. This peculiar kind of cataloguing of unexpected objects and incidents is just what appeals to the child, as undoubtedly it appealed to our primitive ancestors who listened to the

storyteller of the tribe weaving his romances. The difference between the mythology of the child and the mythology of the savage is merely in the atmosphere. The inventive manner is the same. What child would not enjoy the truly marvellous natural history in *A Child's Day*?

“ Seal and Walrus  
And Polar Bear  
One green icy  
Wash-tub share.  
Alligator,  
Nor Hippopot-  
Amus ever  
His bath forgot.  
Out of his forest  
The Elephant tramps  
To squirt himself  
In his gloomy swamps.  
On crackling fins  
From the deep-sea fly,  
Flying-fish into  
The air to dry.  
Silver Swans  
In shallows green  
Their dew-bespangled  
Pinions preen.  
And all day long  
Wash Duck and Drake  
In their duckweed pond  
For washing's sake.”

No writer has made finer use of the catalogue than De la Mare. In *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*

there are gorgeous heaps of things all glittering in bright names. And the author's inventive dexterity finds ample scope in the making of new words belonging to this monkey world. At the beginning of the story, Zebbah, "his broad-nosed face lit up in the blaze of the setting sun," catches sight of the ruinous wooden hut built "by a traveller, a Portugall or Portingal, lost in the forest 22,997 leagues from home." Such detail leaves little room for scepticism, and Zebbah finds inside this hut, besides "the Portingal's little heap of bones," "a broken fire-stone, a kind of chest or cupboard, a table, and a stool, both rough and insect-bitten, but still strong. . . . And he found all manner of strange and precious stuff half-buried in the hut—pots for Subbub; pestles and basins for Manaka-cake, etc.; three bags of great beads, clear, blue, and emerald; an old rusty musket; nine elephantoes' tusks; a bag of Margarita stones; and many other things, besides cloth and spider-silk and dried-up fruits and fishes. He made his dwelling there, and died there. This Mulgar, Zebbah, was Mutta-mattuta's great-great-great-grandfather. Dead and gone were all."

All primitive epic poetry discloses the same delight in names and objects, and detail.

Already in *Songs of Childhood*, however, may be found the nostalgia, the sickness of the soul for a home which is not here, and when we have read "Alulvan," a poem of broad daylight,

" Yet soft along Alulvan's walks  
The ghost at noonday stalks,"

a shadow is crossing the clear joy of childhood ; the imagination is beginning to ruffle its impatient pinions ; suddenly Alulvan and Arroar and even Tartary are not as they seem. We are aware of mankind's hunger for an unattained heaven, a paradise of peace and beauty. The poet is seeking it still in "The Tryst," a poem included in the later and splendid volume, *Motley* :

" Think ! in Time's smallest clock's minutest beat  
Might there not rest be found for wandering feet ?  
Or 'twixt the sleep and wake of a Helen's dream,  
Silence wherein to sing love's requiem ? "

This is not the paradise of the warrior or the strenuous saint, but the "somewhere there nothing is" of the suffering dreamer. Notice, however, that in sighing for the impossible cope of attainment, a lustrous name belonging to literature (the great diary of the world's dreamers) is on the poet's lips. "Helen" is a key to Walter de la Mare's imagination. The power and originality of his work arise from the union of the true poet's ignorance, his unspoilt sense of



wonder, with a deep understanding of the imaginations of other dreamers and their magic of words.

The poems of childhood do not disillusion. Their wistfulness is never sophisticated, rarely reflective, retrospective. The child lives absorbed in the moment. So the eeriness, or the humour, too, is always consistent with the mood of the poem. "The Hare" is a piece of witchery which appeals to the immortally infantile and poetic in us :

" In the black furrow of a field  
I saw an old witch-hare this night ;  
And she cocked a lissome ear,  
And she eyed the moon so bright,  
And she nibbled of the green ;  
And I whispered ' Wh-s-st ! witch-hare,'  
Away like a ghostie o'er the field  
She fled, and left the moonlight there."

Is that not perfect ? But it is not easily written ; there is nothing of the exuberant verbal facility and perhaps felicity of Swinburne's roundels on babies. The very difficulty of the composition contributes to the just effect, because it reveals the artistic and childish seriousness as one. The lovely song, "I met at Eve the Prince of Sleep" is genuine child poetry :

" I met at eve the Prince of Sleep,  
His was a still and lovely face,  
He wandered through a valley steep,  
Lovely in a lonely place.

His garb was gray of lavender,  
About his brows a poppy-wreath  
Burned like dim coals, and everywhere  
The air was sweeter for his breath.

His twilight feet no sandals wore,  
His eyes shone faint in their own flame,  
Fair moths that gloomed his steps before  
Seemed letters of his lovely name."

Although not all children could appreciate the subtleties of these and the remaining stanzas, the colour and music, the rich tapestry of image and the melodious sweetness of the song respond to the essentially childish desire for sensuous beauty. And as for appreciating what we are pleased to call the subtleties of such lyricism, it is always safer to believe than to disbelieve in the child's sensitive discrimination. A lecturer in speech-training for the Glasgow Education Authority, writing about the teaching of poetry to children,<sup>1</sup> says :

"It is generally held that the drawing out of the child's love for the word-music of poetry belongs to a later stage ; but one finds this joy in the beauty of words surprisingly early. I once asked a little girl of about nine, after a general reading in class of Walter de la Mare's

<sup>1</sup> Miss Marjory Gullan, in *The Teacher's World*.

‘Nod,’ which line she liked best, and the answer was :

‘His ram’s bell rings ’neath an arch of stars.’

And the reason she gave was as follows :

“ ‘The first half of the line is full of the bell sounds, and the second half is all big and quiet like the sky at night.’ ”

An ounce of such testimony is better than tons of asseveration from a mere critic !

The child’s absorption in the business of gaining sensory experience is the counterpart of its continual dreaming and myth-making. Its eager perception of new sights and sounds was never expressed before with such *élan* as in *Peacock Pie* :

“ Ann, Ann !  
Come quick as you can !  
There’s a fish that *talks*  
In the frying-pan.  
Out of the fat,  
As clear as glass,  
He put up his mouth  
And moaned ‘ Alas ! ’  
Oh, most mournful,  
‘ Alas, alack ! ’  
Then turned to his sizzling,  
And sank him back.”

*There* is the child’s playfulness. A kind of serio-comic pathetic fallacy ! Such work

comes from a first-hand knowledge of children. The poet told me once a story of a little girl who cried bitterly because a hare had been shot. When she heard that it was about to be skinned in the kitchen, her tears dried up and she begged to be allowed to watch. The two moods of course were quite sincere. He knew this by first-hand experience as well as intuition and memory.

Here is the child's humorous curiosity :

“ It's a very odd thing—  
As odd as can be—  
That whatever Miss T. eats  
Turns into Miss T.

The disappearance of food is one of those things—commonplaces to us—which draw searching questions from a child. Except for the laughing use of the third person, the quaint cogitation of the poem belongs essentially to childhood.

The poet himself has enough humour to satisfy the big demand of the child. “ The Bandog ” is surely one of the most pathetically comic poems ever written. The child inquires :

“ Has any one seen my Mopser ? ”—

and almost in the same breath supplies descriptions of the comely dog, his hair, his teeth, and

His tail it curls straight upwards,  
His ears stand two abreast,  
And he answers to the simple name of Mopser,  
When civilly addressed."

And has the child's metaphysical curiosity ever been answered so justly as in "Mrs. Earth," with its final cogitation :

"Mrs. Earth and Mr. Sun  
Can tan my skin and tire my toes,  
But all that I'm thinking of, ever shall think,  
Why, neither knows."

Of these poems, as Andrew Lang said reviewing *Songs of Childhood*, "one would gladly quote them all." His conclusion, "One can only advise readers fond of poetry to give that of Mr. Ramal a chance," is the highest and justest praise that could be bestowed on this type of the poet's work: it is never merely that abominable make-believe, children's verse; it is never less than good English poetry.

When De la Mare looks at instead of living in childhood, he is artist enough to avoid the sentimental manner which spoilt *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and he writes, as only he can write, poetry in which dream and memory are intermingled. He writes "The Sleeper" and "Martha" in *The Listeners* volume. How sensitively "The Sleeper" is done. A little



girl comes into the house "one summer's day"  
and felt she must creep,

"So silent was the clear cool house."

And pushing open the door she finds her mother  
asleep in that eerie stillness, sitting, "with  
stooping head," in a chair.

"But though her mind in dream now moved,  
Still seemed her gaze to rest—  
From out beneath her fast-sealed lids,  
Above her moving breast—  
On Ann; as quite, quite still she stood;  
Yet slumber lay so deep,  
Even her hands upon her lap  
Seemed saturate with sleep.  
And as Ann peeped, a cloud-like dread  
Stole over her, and then,  
On stealthy, mouse-like feet she trod,  
And tiptoed out again."

*Henry Brocken* followed *Songs of Childhood*, appearing in 1904. In the *Academy*, of 26th March 1904, it was reviewed by Francis Thompson. Its full title, *Henry Brocken: His Travels and Adventures in the Rich, Strange, Scarcely Imaginable Regions of Romance*, drew this rather forbidding opening from the inhumorous spiritual brother of Shelley:

"Mr. de la Mare (who adds on the title-page the pen-name of 'Walter Ramal') has produced

in this book a romance much less wildly wonderful and 'scarce-imaginable' than might be supposed from the somewhat wordy and pretentious title—or rather sub-title."

But the remainder of the review is, to-day, intensely interesting :

"It is the romance which resurrects the immortals of creative fiction, and conceives a series of more or less irresponsible adventures in their company, or revolving around them. There is a natural foundation for it in the sense we all have of these creatures 'reality'—'forms more real than living man,'—as Shelley sings—and the desire we have all felt, at one time or another, to meet in the flesh these 'nurslings of immortality.' Moreover, it affords unlimited scope to wandering fantasy, upon which, indeed, its success mainly depends. We have all come across examples of it, some of them, perhaps, pleasant recollections of our childhood. Nay, do not Lewis Carroll's two masterpieces largely turn upon this device ?

"But with that exception, we cannot recall any book of this nature which has taken permanent place in literature ; and perhaps the fact (if so it be) may suggest an inherent difficulty in the scheme. It challenges comparisons too formidable. The resurrected 'immortals' are

apt to have become strangely pale and disappointingly unreal since first we met them ; the author cannot persuade us that these are the same people we knew so well. Lewis Carroll kept to Nursery Land where the personalities were less defined ; and the wise discretion facilitated his task. Of Humpty-Dumpty or the Knave of Hearts we have no very individualised conception in the nursery. But when you bring back to life the heroes and heroines of great novels, of poetry, you have to do with vital personalities. You are spared the labour of creation ; but because your characters are already created, the strain is the severer on your dramatic power, your power of characterisation.

“ Now that is what Mr. de la Mare has done. Henry Brocken sets out, a child, to seek in the flesh and in some strange land his darling creatures of fiction. Of course he promptly finds them, and grows to manhood in his journey. But the idea of childhood is not kept for a page ; he talks and acts as a man in his first encounter. Lucy Gray, Herrick’s mistresses, Chaucer’s Cressid, with other ladies of poetry, the Sleeping Beauty, Bottom the weaver, Gulliver, nay—most daring of all—Bunyan’s characters and Jane Eyre, are among the people he meets. We cannot say his dramatic power quite rises to the most exacting of these demands, but it is something that it does not wholly fail. With Bunyan, in particular, he has more success than might have

been looked for. But the charm of the book (and it has charm) lies in its fancy and its imaginative description. The author has much of the poet in his composition, and he succeeds best with the fairy and purely poetic element. The book winds on with a true sense of dream, an alluring play of fantasy ; and his style has poetic richness and grace, a fine command of language—with some occasional violences. This, in fine, is a romance of fancy at play, saturated with youth and poetry ; not quite successful only from its too ambitious daring. At the close there is some hint of allegory ; but only, we think, at the close—and to our mind somewhat nebulous, like most modern parables. But the reader has no need to trouble himself with it, in what we may call a fantasia on well-known themes."

A "true sense of dream, an alluring play of fantasy," "poetic richness and grace," "a fine command of language," "saturated with youth and poetry," . . . such admissions from Francis Thompson pointed to something in the unknown writer that was of importance to English literature.

The very quotations attached to the sixteen sections of the book (two or three to each section) alone constitute an exquisite anthology indicative of the author's critical perception, a critical perception which his anthology *Come Hither!*

will be found to prove second to none in the sphere of lyrical poetry. For frontispiece the following two stanzas are quoted from "Tom o' Bedlam" :

" With a heart of furious fancies,  
Whereof I am commander :  
    With a burning spear,  
    And a horse of air,  
To the wilderness I wander.

With a knight of ghosts and shadows,  
I summoned am to Tourney :  
    Ten leagues beyond  
    The wide world's end,  
Methinks it is no journey."

A very suitable preface to the adventures of Henry Brocken. He is a boy who lived lonely years with an Aunt Sophia in a big old house, and night by night read surreptitiously in the library by candlelight till dawn. One fine dawn the wanderlust was too great to be resisted, and mounting an old mare (her name is Rosinante, of course) he wanders away into those "regions where the wise and the imaginative and the immortal have been before him." And for our undying delight he takes us with him, as only a poet could. The Traveller tells us that he can offer no chart or latitude or longitude of these regions, "can affirm only that their frontier



stretches just this side of dream ; that they border Impossibility ; lie parallel with Peace.” After quoting

“ Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray,  
And when I crossed the wild,  
I chanced to see at break of day  
The solitary child,”

he relates how, after Rosinante, left to her own devices, had jogged him across the moor “about an hour,” “and the risen sun was on the extreme verge of the gilded horizon,” he sees between him and the deep woods a little child walking. Presently overtaking her :

“ ‘ Is there no path here, little girl, that I may follow ? ’ I said.

“ ‘ No path at all,’ she answered.

“ ‘ But how then do strangers find their way across the moor ? ’ I said.

“ ‘ She debated with herself a moment. ‘ Some by the stars and some by the moon,’ she answered.

“ ‘ By the moon ! ’ I cried. ‘ But at day, what then ? ’

“ ‘ Oh, then, sir,’ she said, ‘ they can see.’ ”

Lucy Gray at last vanishes as inconsequently as she appeared, and Henry Brocken is ripe for another adventure. Unless one has been for-

tunate enough to read the book, to guess whom Henry Brocken meets next would be impossible. The reader is not left long in suspense. "The sun was wheeling headlong and the stillness of late afternoon was on the woods, when, dusty and parched and heavy, we came to a break in the thick foliage, and presently to a green gate embowered in box." Here Jane Eyre, who has become Jane Rochester, is living with Mr. Rochester. There follow passages which, except in being prose narrative, are dramatic poetry. Henry Brocken sups with the strange couple, and when Mr. Rochester retires to be alone, sits next to Jane, who plays the piano and interjects questions :

" 'And am I indeed only that poor mad thing you thought Jane Eyre?' she said, 'or did you read between?'

"I answered that it was not her words, not even her thoughts, not even her poetry that was to me Jane Eyre.

" 'What, then, is left of me?' she inquired, stooping her eyes over the keys and smiling darkly. 'Am I indeed so evanescent, a wintry wraith?'

" 'Well,' I said, 'Jane Eyre is left.'

"She pressed her lips together. 'I see,' she said brightly; 'but then, was I not detestable

too? So stubborn, so wilful, so demented, so—vain?’

“‘You were vain,’ I answered, ‘because——’

“‘Well?’ she said, and the melody died out, and the lower voice of her music complained softly on.

“‘For a barrier,” I answered.

“‘A barrier?’ she cried.

“‘Why, yes,’ I said, ‘a barrier against cant, and flummery, and coldness and pride, and against—why, against your own vanity too.’

“‘That’s really very clever—penetrating,’ she said; ‘and I really desired to know, not because I did not know already, but to know I knew all. You are a perspicacious observer, Mr. Brocken; and to be that is to be alive in a world of the moribund. But then, too, how high one must soar at times; for one must ever condescend in order to observe faithfully. At any rate, to observe all, one must range at an altitude above all.’”

Here is a useful hint to warn the reader of *Henry Brocken* that the book reflects the deep-thoughted observation of the author as well as his child-like, elfin fantasy and his fascinated interest in magic casements. The discovery by Henry Brocken of *Sleeping Beauty* in the enchanted castle is profound as well as exquisite poetry. And the chapters in which he con-

verses with or listens to Mistrust, Obstinate, Liar, and other characters in Bunyan's dream, suggest that the poet well understood Jane Eyre's dictum on observing faithfully. The author reveals himself as a profound moral philosopher and a Puritan of the first water as well as a poet of intensely dramatic imagination during the unforgettable scene in that universal Inn. This is one of the moments when he has soared above childhood and manhood, to turn a gaze of passionate contemplation upon human life. Here in his second book is the indication that if we are to expect in the future from Mr. de la Mare any work on a bigger scale (which is not to say more accomplished or necessarily more valuable) than that of his we may already enjoy, such work will belong to the dramatic rather than to the epic poet which some critics have anticipated. His play for children, *Crossings*, though but a thing of fairy-like delicacy, reveals surprising technical skill and rich characterisation in a small compass.

*The Three Mulla-Mulgars* is apparently a delicious story for children of three little monkeys of royal race and their marvellous adventures in seeking through forest, swamp, river, and perilous mountains, the paradisal valleys of Tishnar, where their uncle Assasimmon's palace

stands, and to seek which their old father left them years before. There is a riot of lovely phantasy, of sly fun, of poetic vision, in the story. There is also a sympathy, almost tenderness, arising from the quality of vision, which gives to Nod, Thumb, and Thimble, the three adventurous brothers, and to Seelem, their father, and Mutta, their mother, distinct and half-human characters.

“ Mutta wished only that Seelem was not quite so grim and broody ; that the Munza-mulgars (forest-monkeys) would not come stealing her Subbub and honey ; and that the Portingal’s hut stood quite out of the silvery moon-mist that rose from the swamp ; for she suffered (as do most fruit-monkeys) from the bones-ache. Seelem was gentle and easy in his own moody way with Mutta and his three sons, but, most of all, he cheered his heart with tiny Nod, the Nizza-neela. Sometimes all day long this old travel-worn Mulla-mulgar never uttered a sound, save at evening, when he sang or droned his evening hymn to Tishnar. He kept a thick stick, which he called his Guzza, to punish his three sons when they were idle and sullen, or gluttonous, or with Munza tricks pestered their mother. And he never favoured Nod beyond the others more than all good fathers favour the youngest, the littlest, and the gaysomest of their children.”



Seelem taught his sons to make fire, to count, and many other marvellous things.

“ He taught them, too, the common tongue of the forest-monkeys—that is, the language of nearly all the Mulgars that live in the forests of Munza—Jacquet-mulgars, Mullabruks, purple-faced and saffron-headed Mulgars, Skeetoes, tuft-waving Manquabees, Fly-catchers and Squirrel-tails, and many more than I can mention. Seelem taught them also a little of the languages of the dreaded Gunga-mulgars, of the Collobs, and the Babbaboomas. But the Minimul-mulgars’ and the Oomgar’s or man-monkeys’ languages (white, black, or yellow) he could not teach, because he did not know them. When, however, they were alone together they spoke the secret language of the Mulla-mulgars dwelling north of the Arrakaboas—that is, Mulgar-royal. This language in some ways resembles that of the Portugalls, in some that of the Oggewibbies, and, here and there—but in very little—Garniereze. . . . But, above all, he taught them to walk upright, never to taste blood, and never, unless in danger or despair, to climb trees or to grow a tail.”

“ But now, after all these thirteen years of absence from Assasimmon’s palace in the beautiful valleys of Tishnar, Seelem ” developed a nostalgia for his old home, grew more morose, “ his eyes

fixed mournfully in the air. And Mutta would whisper to Nod : ‘ Sst, zun nizza-neela, tusweeta zan nuome.’ ” Which, like the foregoing details, leaves little more to be said on the subject, except that the words are a satisfying explanation of everything.

Packed as the story is with the perils and triumphs of adventure, the physical adventure of travel in strange regions, a spiritual epic runs all through it, culminating in the arrival of the travellers in Tishnar. The author has been enabled here, “ to observe all, by ranging at an altitude above all.” The vision is wider, more accomplished, than the vision in *Henry Brocken* ; it is a vision of the whole of life.

When we first have our eyes fully opened to the profundity of the satire behind the fairy tale is when Nod, lost and parted awhile from his distressed brothers, falls into the hands of an “ Oomgar,” or man. It becomes obvious then that the poet has drawn the universe of monkeys to a perfectly self-consistent scale of intelligence and incident and aspiration, so that when little Nod, who owns “ the Wonder-Stone of Tishnar ” and is a nizza-neela, or one who has magic in him, is brought into contact with Andy Battle, the stranded, exiled sailor, the

significance of human life on the earth is illuminated as only W. H. Hudson in *Green Mansions* has illuminated it before. But the method of *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* is directly, oppositely different from the method of *Green Mansions*. Hudson envisages a lovely archaic race of which the beautiful girl Rima is sole survivor. Described allegorically, *Green Mansions* is the story of a poet's passion for a beauty too intense and fine for our coarse society. The beauty and the wisdom of *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* are qualities displayed by the child at its serious play. The monkey universe is but the sphere of mankind's infantile poetic thought. Every detail in the story fits into the primitive picture with so unobtrusive a justice that when little Nod is caught by Battle, the reader is suddenly surprised at the width as well as the shallowness of the gap between man and nature. Nod, Thumb, and Thimble had seemed so familiar: they had seemed the child in any one of us.

“But Nod, dangling in terror, could clearly see the Oomgar peering at him from beneath the unstirring branches—his colourless skin, his long yellow hair, his musket, his fixed, glittering eyes. And there came suddenly a voice out of the Oomgar, like none the little Mulgar had ever heard in his life before.”

Nod's stay with Andy Battle, in the hut beside the forest, deepens the effect. To Nod, "all creatures else he had ever seen seemed dark and cloudy by comparison. The Oomgar's face was strange and fair, like the shining of a flame." A happy companionship between them develops, and Nod learns to talk to the sailor, each mastering something of the other's language. Here is one of the scenes in the hut :

"Night rose in starry darkness above the great black forest. The logs burned low. Close before his fire sat Battle, his chin on his breast, his yellow-haired head rolling from side to side in his sleep. Thin clear flames, blue and sulphur, floated along the logs, and lit up his fast-shut eyes. Nod sat with his little chops in his hairy hands watching the sailor. Sometimes a solitary beast roared, or a night-bird squalled out of the gloom. At last the little book fell out of Battle's sleep-loosened fingers. He started, raised his head, and stared into the darkness, listening to howl answering to howl, shrill cry to distant cry. He yawned, showing all his small white teeth.

" 'Your friends are uncommon fidgety to-night, Nod Mulgar,' he said.

"Nod got up and threw more wood on the glowing fire. 'Not Mulla-mulgar's friends.

Nod's friends not hate Oomgar.' Up sprang the flames, hissing and crackling.

"The sailor grinned. 'Lor' bless ye, my son; you talks wonnerful hoity-toity; but in *my* country they would clap ye into a cage.'

"'Cage?' said Nod.

"'Ay, in a stinking cage, with iron bars, for the rabble to jeer at. What would the monkeys do with a white man, an Oomgar, if they cotched 'n?'

"'In my father Seelem's hut over there,' said Nod, waving his long hand towards the Sulemnager, 'Oomgar's bones hanged click, click, click in the wind.'

"'They hates us, eh? Picks us clean?'

"Nod looked at him gravely. 'Mulla-mulgar—me—not hate Oomgar. All Munza'—he lifted his brows—'ay! he kill and eat, eat, eat, same as leopard, same as Jaccatray.'

"Battle frowned. 'It's tit for tat, my son. I kills Roses (Mulla-mulgar for leopard) or Roses kills me. Not a Jack-All that howls moon up over yonder that wouldn't say grace for a picking. But apes and monkeys, no; not even a warty old drumming Pongo that's twice as ugly as his own shadow in the glass. I never did burn powder 'gainst a monkey yet. What's more,' said Battle, 'who's to know but we was all what you call Oomgars once? Good as. You've just come down in the world, that's all. And who's to blame ye? No barbers,



no ships, no larnin', no nothing. Breeches? One pair, my son, to half a million, as far as Andy ever set eyes on. Maybe you come from that wicked King Pharaoh over in Egypt there. Maybe you was one of the plagues, and scuttled off with the fleas.' He grinned cheerfully. Nod watched his changing face, but what he said now he could not understand.

" 'There's just one thing, Master Mulgar,' went on Battle solemnly. 'Kill or not kill, hairy as hairy, or bald as a round-shot, God made us every one. And speakin' comfortable-like 'twixt you and me, just as my old mother taught me years gone by, I planks me down on my knees like any babby this very hour gone by, while you was sliding in your shoes, and said me prayers out loud. I'm getting mortal sick of being lonesome. Not that I blames *you*, my son. You're better company than fifty-million parakeets, and seven-and-seventy Mullagoes of blackamoors.'

"Nod stared gravely. 'Oomgar talk; Nod unnerstand — no.' He sorrowfully shook his head.

" 'My case all over,' said Battle, 'Andy unnerstand—no . . .'

The deep implications of the poet's work have often brought us beyond the legitimate borders of the poetry of childhood, although *Songs of Childhood*, *A Child's Day*, *Henry Brocken*, and

*The Three Mulla-Mulgars* are all of interest to children. There are, moreover, things in the *Memoirs of a Midget* and in *The Riddle and Other Stories* revealing as well as a sensitive understanding of child psychology the gift of appealing to the child mind. The little midget's entries in her journal are full of most delicate perceptions, true memories of childhood in which her diminutive stature does not cause any unnatural distortion. And a story like *The Riddle* is the folk-story essentialised into modern poetry, so that it acquires a symbolic value.

"Ann and Matilda, James, William and Henry, Harriet and Dorothea, came to live with their grandmother." The house was built in the time of the Georges, and grandmother had lived there since her childhood. Nothing but the imaginative quality of poetry could have made a tale so mysteriously full of meaning out of the simple elements of this. Seven children in a very old, spacious house, the grandmother seated at the window, and the forbidden oak chest in a vacant room, into which the children climb one by one; the lid closes softly on them, and they each disappear for ever. All are gone—except the old lady, but: "Through the long day the grandmother sat in her bow-window," watching the street.

“ At evening she climbed the stair and stood in the doorway of the large spare bedroom.” She peered into “ the quiet gloom, but she could not see far, because her sight was dim and the light of day feeble. Nor could she detect the faint fragrance, as of autumnal leaves. But in her mind was a tangled skein of memories—laughter and tears, and little children, now old-fashioned, and the advent of friends, and long farewells. And gossiping fitfully with herself, the old lady went down again to her window-seat.”

His short stories and his novels, *The Return* and *The Memoirs of a Midget*, were certainly not aimed by the artist at children, and it is necessary to discriminate between what appeals to children and the work which is adult in being more intellectual and analytical. The division is much sharper between his adult prose and his lyrical verse. In the verse the poetry being so charged with dream-thought, is often very near to the child even when it is the full expression of a poetic maturity. This smooth transition from fantastical invention to deep-brained poetry is shown in the gorgeous piece of prose which serves as a final comment on the universe of *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*. It appears as a footnote quite early in the book ; but what a footnote !

“Tishnar is a very ancient word in Munza, and means that which cannot be thought about in words, or told, or expressed. So all the wonderful, secret, and quiet world beyond the Mulgars’ lives is Tishnar—wind and stars, too, the sea, and the endless unknown. But here it is only the Beautiful One of the Mountains that is meant. So beautiful is she that a Mulgar who dreams even of one of her Maidens, and wakes still in the presence of his dream, can no longer be happy in the company of his kind. He hides himself away in some old hole or rocky fastness, lightless, matted, and uncombed, and so thins and pines, or becomes a Wanderer or Mōh-mulgar. But it is rare for this to be, for very few Mulgars dream beyond the mere forest, as it were; and fewer still keep the memories of their dreams when the livelong vision of Munza returns to their waking eyes. The Valleys of Tishnar lie on either flank of the Mountains of Arakkaboa, though she herself wanders only in the stillness of the mountain snows. She is shown veiled on the rude pots of Assasimmon and in Mulgar scratch-work, with one slim-fingered hand clasping her robe of palest purple, her head bent a little, as if hearkening to her thoughts; and she is shod with sandals of silver. Of these things the wandering Oomgar-nuggas, or black men, tell. From Tishnar, too, comes the Last Sleep—the sleep of all the World. The last sleep just of their own life only is Nōōmanossi—darkness,



change, and the unreturning. And Immanâla is she who preys across these shadows, in this valley. So, too, the Mulgars say, 'Nōōma, Nōōma,' when they mean shadow, as 'In the sun paces a leopard's Nōōma at her side.' Meermut, which means in part also shadow, as it were, of lesser light lost in Tishnar's radiance, just as moonlight may cast a shadow of a pine-tree across a smouldering fire. There is, too, a faint wind that breathes in the first twilight and starshine of Munza called the Wind of Tishnar. It was, I think, the faint murmur of this wind that echoed in the ear of Mutta-matutta as she lay dying, for in dying one hears, it is said, what in life would carry no more tidings to the mind than light brings to the hand. Nod's bells that he heard, and thought were his father's, must have been the Zevvera's bells of Tishnar's water-middens, all wandering Meermuts. These Water-middens, or Water-maidens, are like the beauty of the moonlight. The countless voices of fountain, torrent, and cataract are theirs. They, with other of Tishnar's Maidens, come riding on their belled Zevveras, and a strange silence falls where their little invisible horses are tethered ; while, perhaps the Maidens sit feasting in a dell, grey with moonbeams and ghostly flowers. Even the sullen Mullabruk learns somehow of their presence, and turns aside on his fours from the silvery mist of their glades and green alleys, just as in the same wise a cold air



seems to curdle his skin when some haunting Nōōma passes by. All the inward shadows of the creatures of Munza-mulgar are Nōōmanossi's ; all their phantoms, spirits, or Meermuts are Tishnar's. And so there is a never-ending changeableness and strife in their short lives. The leopard (or Roses, as they call her, for the beauty of her clear black spots) is Meermut to her cubs, Nōōma to the dodging Skeetoos she lies in wait for, stretched along a bough. Her beauty is Tishnar's ; the savagery of her claws is Nōōmanossi's. So Munza's children are dark or bright, lovely or estranging, according as Meermut or Nōōma prevails in their natures. And thus, too, they choose the habitation of their bodies. Yet, because dark is but day gone, and cruelty *unkindness*, therefore even the heart-shattering Nōōmanossi, even Immanâla herself, is only absent Tishnar. But there, as every one can see, I am only chattering about what I cannot understand."

## CHAPTER IV

### POETRY AS DREAM

Two Types of Literature—Shakespeare's Tragic Fool—  
"Motley"—"The Vats"—The Eternity Dream—  
Christina Rossetti unlike De la Mare—Poe—Tennyson  
—From Folk Balladry to the Modern Mind.

THERE are two recognisable types of literature, roughly corresponding with the conscious and the unconscious modes of thought. As conscious reasoning and unconscious association interpenetrate, so do the two kinds of literature also mingle where they meet, while extreme logical control and complete spontaneity always tend to lose the artistic quality which intensifies speech into literature. The broad division, however, remains valid. It is roughly, but only roughly, parallel with the common distinction between "inspired" and "uninspired." Poetry is a mixture of inspiration and rational thinking, and its character is determined by the ratio of these ingredients. It is clearly understood, for instance, that the work of Pope

belongs to a class distinct from that of Coleridge or Blake. The greater the inspiration in poetry (what Pater termed "soul") the more prophetic in character is the poet. The function of the modern poet, no less than was that of the old Greek oracle, is to preserve a balance between dream and reality. He has to preserve another balance, corresponding to this, between the original inspiration and its expression. There are poets who think scientifically, like the late W. H. Hudson, who characteristically depend mainly upon conscious arrangement of the materials of experience, perceiving them as objective facts; while others use blood for ink and the soul as lamp. These attend more obediently and unerringly upon an inner impulse which we are now pleased to term the "unconscious." All "inspired" or "magical" poetry is shaped in and impelled from the hidden activity of that vast sphere of mind which remembers and feels so much more than the individual is aware of remembering and feeling. The recognition of the validity of dream-thought is by no means modern, for the mantic character of the poet descends by divine right from the prophet and the oracle. The glamour of poetry arises from the mystery of its composition, its magical creation "out of a mouthful of air," and from a recognition of its dream

source. The subtle changes which come over the plain symbols of language when these are grouped into a poem resemble the transformation of the common elements of daily life into the imagery of dream. The change in the elements of the language is apparent rather than real. The effect of a poem—its colour and music and synthesis of perceptions—is something which happens in the reader or hearer. The poem throws the reader's mind into a more or less complete state of dream. It does this by infinitely complex associations of sound, rhythm, image, pattern. Its beauty is the reflection of the poet's dream in the dreaming mind of readers.

### THE TRAGIC FOOL

We have no better term than "beauty" to indicate this irrational appeal which is peculiarly the characteristic of dream poetry. A supreme example of dream-meaning can be found in the poetry of Shakespeare's fools, especially his tragic fools. Probably Shakespeare himself at the moment of composing *King Lear* did not know all that he was doing, did not realise what poignant and profound emotion he was to evoke from this strange character which originally owed his existence to the dramatist's concession to a vulgar tradition.

Whether the Fool in *King Lear* is an imbecile or merely simulating madness, is a question which disappears in the prodigious effect of his utterances. This effect is due to Shakespeare's inspired imagination, which charged the Fool's words, particularly in the Storm Scenes, with a sort of divine madness. The words of prophets and of fools often contain the same fundamental appeal to an unconscious wisdom in us. Lear is continually being driven by the very exacerbation of passion into rational incoherence, into an atmosphere of dream where irrationally we can still understand his words. Much of the play is exactly a nightmare, because we are taken so deeply into the old man's soul. Lear could not speak his insane bitterness in a state of complete self-consciousness, and without the Fool's presence and remote responses language, even in Shakespeare's hands, could have been hardly adequate in portraying the wild movements of that sombre mind.

Now one of Mr. de la Mare's finest poems, "Motley," is a dreaming Fool's song, the kernel of a tragedy, the heart of a drama. Its effect on us is more poignant and direct than the most scathing of explicit condemnations of war, or the bitterest realism. It conveys the ineffable incongruity of man's inhumanity to man, to



himself; it hints the horror that is beyond sane utterance.

“Come, Death, I’d have a word with thee;  
And thou, poor Innocency;  
And Love—a lad with broken wing;  
And Pity, too;  
The Fool shall sing to you,  
As Fools will sing.”

He has dreadful secrets to breathe to them, and lest some “hideous listener tells” he’ll ring his bells.

“They’re all at war!”

Amid “rain and blood and spouting fire” they have gone, and the moon, the new moon, is glinting “hard on eyes wide with insanities.” But he is using words he hardly knows the meaning of. Why, the very birds glancing at Love tremble at treacheries in the noonday. He would not have his words of frenzied hosts of men who kill and die, he would not have his words taken seriously. The happy human heart is a child.

“Thou silly thing, off to thy daisies go.  
Mine was not news for child to know,  
And Death—no ears hath. He hath supped where creep  
Eyeless worms in hush of sleep;  
Yet, when he smiles, the hand that draws  
Athwart his grinning jaws—  
Faintly the thin bones rattle, and—there, there;  
Hearken how my bells in the air  
Drive away care! . . .”

But he cannot keep silent. He must speak of the incredible dream, the horror that is beyond belief.

“Nay, but a dream I had  
Of a world all mad.  
Not simple happy mad like me,  
Who am mad like an empty scene  
Of water and willow tree,  
Where the wind hath been ;  
But that foul Satan-mad,  
Who rots in his own head,  
And counts the dead,  
Not honest one—and two—  
But for the ghosts they were,  
Brave, faithful, true,  
When, head in air,  
In Earth’s clear green and blue  
Heaven they did share  
With beauty who bade them there. . . .”

“Motley,” “The Marionettes,” and “The Fool’s Song,” and, in *The Veil* collection, the poem entitled “The Monologue,” indicate a range of mental travelling (if “Tartary” is regarded as being at one extreme of Mr. de la Mare’s work) which has hardly been appreciated as belonging to his dream poetry. This characteristic dream poetry, however, lies nearer to the imaginative child poems than to those later poems where the poet is driven to pray the ghost of beauty :

“Be but my Faith in thee,  
For sanity’s sake.”

Many, indeed, of the poems in *Down-a-Down Derry*, *Peacock Pie*, and *Songs of Childhood* would by any strict classification be included in his dream poetry. But the convenient division into poetry of dream includes almost everything in the three collections entitled *Lyrical Poems*, *The Listeners*, and *Motley*, as well as *Henry Brocken*, and, with reservations, *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*.

Dream poetry, being the product of a primitive mode of thought, always resembles child poetry in one particular. It is sensuous. It is melodious, strongly rhythmical, and loaded with imagery. Folk-tales, ballads, and primitive epics are all remarkable for their dream-like richness of imagery. In Edward Thomas's *Cloud Castle* a speaker asks the narrator of childish reminiscences if he is aware that his "wool-gathering" tale has consisted almost entirely of sequences of images. Dream is associational thought originating involuntarily and never completely controlled by the consciousness. The dream-thought of poetry appeals to the soul by a direct path which skirts round the ratiocinative faculty because the unconscious mind in which it is born is, so to speak, on the shores of that universal ocean of life whence all creatures have come by slow ascent. Superficial idiosyncrasies of the individual affect his rational thinking much more

readily than his dream-thought. Dream is impulsive, moved by the tides of elemental emotion, though on its way to the surface of the mind its course may be diverted and its current divided. Coming from the deeps, from a common pool of memory, when it finds concrete expression in art it calls to the same deeps in other individuals.

### THE ETERNITY DREAM

Walter de la Mare is among the greatest poets of English dream poetry, as he is beyond doubt the greatest English poet of childhood. In the combination of rhythmical subtleties, colourful music, wealth of lovely imagery, and (a not unimportant consideration) the quantity of excellent work he has given us, De la Mare belongs to the elect company of Browne, Traherne, Donne, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, Poe, the Rossettis, Swinburne, Francis Thompson, and W. B. Yeats. It is not intended here to set upon the thankless and not very useful task of apportioning degrees of "greatness" among these artists. Quite apart from any positive difference of stature amongst such poets, the personal taste of the reader will always incline judgment to one or the other on grounds other than strictly critical. Though there are moments when one poet in the hierarchy of song appears transcendent, it is doubtful if De la Mare

can be critically assigned a rank below any of those already mentioned as an inspired poet. Every one retains preferences, and there is no need to insist upon the truth of a judgment which is perhaps premature. To one reader the rhythm of Swinburne's "Hesperia," for instance, with its other qualities, will make the poem seem one of the loveliest and most perfect things in the language; the pattern of Keats's "Ode to Autumn" seems so faultless that the more one reads it the more exciting it is; the glamour of "Kubla Khan" remains uncanny to this day; the splendour and profundity of Francis Thompson's "Mistress of Vision" is sublime; the sustained magical power and the tremendous images of W. B. Yeats's "The Wanderings of Usheen" are unequalled by any other dream poem in English. But the magic of De la Mare, like that of Shelley, is a continually if not continuously welling fount. Only the mind of Shelley or of Yeats is comparable to his among the poets of first rank for this accessibility to dream. After transforming much of his poetry of childhood into some of the finest dream poetry in English literature, this magic pours a phantasmal light over a great sheaf of his adult verse, and into such prose as that of "The Creatures" and "The Vats."

How fine is the art which can express a dream



of timelessness—the theme of that lovely poem “The Tryst”—as it is expressed in the prose of “The Vats”! Here the words become almost notes of music, and the reader perceives that sound is not less important than image in the poet’s style when inspiration is intense. The music of words, which will be examined later, is something much more subtle than mere imitation. The magical effect of “The Vats” is not due to onomatopœic words which Katherine Mansfield, for instance, used so skilfully, but to some equally primitive quality, more complex and stored with ancestral associations.

Two friends walking over the countryside lose themselves in thoughts of Time and Eternity. Suddenly they come upon “The Vats,” “in cluster enormous under the cloudless sky.” These were

“vast semi-spherical Cisterns . . . no sunbeams dispread themselves here. They lay slumbering in a grave, crystal light, which lapped, deep as the Tuscarora Trough, above and around their prodigious stone plates, or slats, or slabs, or laminae; their steep slopes washed by the rarified atmosphere of their site, and in hue of a hoary green.”

The narrator adds reflection to description

until the reader is saturated in "the grave, crystal light" of that soundless atmosphere. The Vats "wore that air of lovely timelessness which decks the thorn, and haunts for the half-woken sense the odour of sweet-brier; yet they were grey with the everlasting, as are the beards of the patriarchs and the cindery craters of the Moon. Theirs was the semblance of having been lost, forgotten, abandoned, like some foundered Nereid-haunted derelict of the first sailors, rotting in dream upon an undiscovered shore. They hunched their vast shapes out of the green beneath the sunless blue of space, and for untrodden leagues around them stretched like a paradisaal savanna what we poor thronging clock-vexed men call Silence. Solitude.

"In telling of these Vats it is difficult to convey in mere words even a fraction of their effect upon our minds. They called to some hidden being within us that, if not their coeval, was at least aware of their exquisite antiquity. Whether of archangelic or dæmonic construction, clearly they had remained unvisited by mortal man for as many centuries at least as there are cherries in Damascus or beads in Tierra del Fuego. Sharers of this, we two dwarf visitors had whispered an instant or so together, face to face; and then were again mute."

If such language could be explained, what would be left inexplicable in poetry? Do you

not see the two small brown faces meeting in the hush of awe beside that gulf of eternity? "*As many centuries at least as there are cherries in Damascus or beads in Tierra del Fuego*"—listen to the siren words and you are lost, like the two travellers, lost out of time, wandering on the brink of the eternal solitude of remotest phantasy. Although the author uses enough story-telling machinery to capture the reader's attention, "The Vats" is less a story than a dream-fragment embodied in prose. What secret language runs in this poetry calling to unsuspected, esoteric wisdom in us, who shall say? How answer such a question as "*Why cherries in Damascus, or beads in Tierra del Fuego?*" or "*What is the Tuscarora Trough?*" These things "call to some hidden being in us." "The Vats" is dream poetry. There is no need here of the artifice of verse, and it is mere critical irrelevance to ask the poet to pour these living waters into any other channel than the one he—a great artist—has chosen. He has given us much beautiful verse.

A phrase in "The Vats" reveals the personal source of one image there—"that air of lovely timelessness which decks the thorn, and haunts for the half-woken sense the odour of sweet-brier."

Here the experience is universalised. In *The*

*Listeners* is a little poem entitled "The Hawthorn hath a Deathly Smell," the second stanza of which is :

"An apple, a child, dust,  
When falls the evening rain,  
Wild brier's spicèd leaves,  
Breathe memories again ;  
With further memory fraught,  
The silver of the may  
Wreathed is with incense for  
The Judgment Day,"

which is the individual experience, and one key to the emotional source of the Eternity dream—a regret for the past, a longing for restful security from greedy Time and Death, who slay and rob all that the heart would hold.

"But beauty vanishes, beauty passes ;  
However rare—rare it be ;  
And when I crumble, who will remember  
This lady of the West Country ? "

It is the impulse behind many of the poems. The poet must gather up the treasures that Time is taking away. In one mood he would store them up in one lovely memory :

"You, in the valley standing,  
In your quiet wonder took  
All that glamour, peace, and mystery  
In one grave look.  
Beauty hid your naked body,  
Time dreamed in your bright hair,  
In your eyes the constellations  
Burned far and fair."

After a magnificent piece of rhetoric on "Nightfall" he cries with the accents of the mystic "A.E.":

"Cities of men, in blindness hidden low,  
Fume their faint flames to that arched firmament,  
But all the dwellers in the lonely know  
The unearthly are abroad, and weary and spent,  
With rush extinguished, to their dreaming go.  
And world and night and star-enclustered space,  
The glory of beauty are in one enravished face."

"Life" is a trembling back

"To earth's same empty track  
Of leaden day by day, and hour by hour,"

and the lovers must be

"Of all things lovely the cold mortuary."

For a time all is disillusionment outside the dream. In the dream itself he is still seeking. The three strangers, "bare-footed, cowled," meet one "on urgent, secret errand bent," and confer with him and wish him God-speed, and he resumes his travelling over the far tranquil hills of dream. He was that "lone hastening solitary" in the dream:

"And each world's night in vain  
I patient wait on sleep to unveil  
Those vivid hills again."

In Life, a strange city, he knows two houses well:

"One wherein Silence a garden hath,  
And one where Dark doth dwell."



That garden of silence he will lead you into  
with eyes dreamful yet watchful :

“ Speak not—whisper not ;  
Here bloweth thyme and bergamot ;  
Softly on the evening hour,  
Secret herbs their spices shower,  
Dark-spiked rosemary and myrrh,  
Lean-stalked, purple lavender. . . .”

But beware, and “ breathe not—trespass not ” :

“ Of this green and darkling spot,  
Latticed from the moon’s beams,  
Perchance a distant dreamer dreams ;  
Perchance upon its darkening air,  
The unseen ghosts of children fare,  
Faintly swinging sway and sweep,  
Like lovely sea-flowers in the deep.”

So is Anerley transformed by magic !

Nearly all these dream poems—“ Alexander ”  
is one of the exceptions—make no pretence to  
be other than expressions of personal emotion,  
the individual’s reactions to life and death and  
beauty. The poet is a haunted man, though

“ I was at peace until you came  
And set a careless mind aflame,”

he remonstrates. Now he must abandon himself  
to the “ ghostly lips and eyes,” to the nostalgia  
of unsatisfied desire and the painful attendance  
on revelation.

“ . . . O vision grave,  
Take all the little all I have !”

he cries in a despair that is an ecstatic worship of a beauty ever imminent and ever unattained.

“ This only I say—though cold and bare  
The haunted house you have chosen to share,  
Still 'neath its walls the moonbeam goes  
And trembles on the untended rose ;  
Still o'er its broken roof-tree rise  
The starry arches of the skies :  
And 'neath your lightest word shall be  
The thunder of an ebbing sea.”

#### UNLIKE CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Only Poe among the greatest makers of English dream poetry was so concentrated on the personal visionary quest. Even Christina Rossetti, a no less haunted poet, continually objectified the personal hunger, carried it for instance into the narrative of “ The Prince's Progress ” and into “ Goblin Market.” She, however, was in the long run the most personal of them all, and many of her poems have no more remoteness to the immediate emotion of her own hunger than a mere title can bestow. Thus “ Mariana ” :

“ Not for me marring or making,  
Not for me giving or taking ;  
I love my Love and he loves not me,  
I love my Love and my heart is breaking,”

which is as unrestrained as a lyric in a popular

magazine. Her finest personal music is beaten out on the sonorous but unyielding frame of the sonnet ; it is always inspired by dream, but it is radically unlike the music or the imagery or the delving thought of De la Mare. Only her mood of nescience reminds us of his—

“ ‘ Oh rest,’ I thought, ‘ in silence and the dark :  
Oh, rest, if nothing else, from head to feet.  
Though I may see no more the popped wheat,  
Or sunny soaring lark ’ ”—

she writes in a poem that is one long cry of remorse, because :

“ Now all the cherished secrets of my heart,  
Now all my hidden hopes, are turned to sin.  
Part of my life is dead, part sick, and part  
Is all on fire within.

The fruitless thought of what I might have been,  
Haunting me ever, will not let me rest.  
A cold North wind has withered all my green,  
My sun is in the West.”

Except the nostalgia there is nothing here in common with the dream poetry of De la Mare. The thought is that of a poet whose emotional force has so overswept the intellectual energy that ideas and images are reduced to the bare, bald simplicity of folk-song. To use a distinction made by Poe, this “ excitement of the heart ” is not the highest province of poetry.

Otherwise Mrs. Browning's "Cry of the Children," and Hood's "Song of the Shirt," would be supreme examples of lyrical poetry.

These are excellent in their kind, but as poetry they are less than Coleridge's "Christabel," Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," Milton's "Lycidas," Shelley's "Serenade," or—not to extend the list unnecessarily—De la Mare's "Remonstrance." So, too, are the best songs and sonnets—and these are very fine—of Christina Rossetti. She is explicitly a poet of thwarted sexual love and of religious consolation, and the very richness of colour in her religious poems is the ardency of starved love. When all prayer and admonishment has been sung, she returns to the note of—

"What seekest thou, far in the unknown land?  
 In hope I follow joy gone on before;  
 In hope and fear persistent more and more  
 As the dry desert lengthens out its sand."

And thence to "Cor Mio":

"Still sometimes in my secret heart of hearts  
 I say 'Cor mio' when I remember you."

Her connection with the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is only partly responsible for her willingness to use lilies, roses, poppies, silver and gold as symbols and therefore with diminished poetic and intellectual intensity, and the word "some"

occurs with unfortunate frequency in her work to serve the purpose of a facile generalisation. "Some" bird sings, "some" flower glows bright. This vapidness of language is never a fault in De la Mare's poetry, for the finest poetry of dream has to pass through an alert intellect. If he is ever vague, the vagueness is due to an overload of meaning for an immature craftsmanship. Christina Rossetti's poems from which the above extracts are taken reveal no immaturity of craftsmanship at all, but the emotion has rushed them away from the brooding imagination. De la Mare sees too intently, and is aware always of an aura of the inexplicable lurking about every object. This continual testing of shades of thought separates his simplest dream poetry from the big class of the "heart-exciting." He is always pursuing faintest hues of the phantasmal light that never was except in the dominion of dreams.

#### POE AND TENNYSON

If his poetry is compared with Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan," its intellectual kinship with that of the poet who was also a great thinker and a subtle critic can immediately be recognised. That acute albeit dogmatic analyst, Patmore, discovered



so much refinement of craft in Coleridge's "Christabel" that on such a basis he almost built a system of criticism. In the matter of spiritual affinity one turns from De la Mare to Edgar Allan Poe, to find the latter's craftsmanship inferior. Poe is an example of great subtlety of mind hampered on the threshold of expression by a ubiquitous analytic faculty exercised at the wrong moment, and possibly also by technical deficiencies of the verbal magician. If magic means anything it implies an inexplicable production of results, though rich resources of craft. But Poe is continually endeavouring to manufacture his magical effects, so that his genuine inspiration is often smothered in self-consciousness. It is not necessary to accept his account of the composition of "The Raven" unreservedly in order to see this falsity of aim in nearly all his verse. A universal theme of dream poetry can be found in "The Haunted Palace," for instance, and the poem is worth re-reading.

" In the greenest of our valleys  
By good angels tenanted,  
Once a fair and stately palace—  
Radiant palace—reared its head.  
In the monarch Thought's dominion—  
It stood there !  
Never seraph spread a pinion  
Over fabric half so fair."

The remembered enchantment has not all gone, but obviously there is too much of that monarch Thought. As we read through the poem, assonance, alliteration ("The viol, the violet, and the vine" kind of thing), and even rhyme become a vice, while the idea loses all its subtlety in the process of translation into words. His "City in the Sea" is more successful, and enchants; but it will be found to suffer by comparison with the living poet's "Sunk Lyonesse," in which each word has a far higher amperage of power. The music, too, moves severely and with dirge-like solemnity, as if swaying with the undersea tide.

"In sea-cold Lyonesse,  
When the Sabbath eve shafts down  
On the roofs, walls, belfries  
Of the foundered town,  
The Nereids pluck their lyres  
Where the green translucency beats,  
And with motionless eyes at gaze  
Make minstrelsy in the streets. . . ."

Nay, that is De la Mare, not Poe, though confusion were forgivable. Here is Poe:

"No rays from the holy heaven come down  
On the long night-time of that town;  
But light from out the lurid sea  
Streams up the turrets silently—  
Gleams up the pinnacles far and free—  
Up domes—up spires—up kingly halls—  
Up fanes—up Babylon-like walls—

Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers  
Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers—  
Up many and many a marvellous shrine,  
Whose wreathed friezes intertwine  
The viol, the violet, and the vine."

The first quotation is merely the opening of "Sunk Lyonesse," but the second is selected as the best passage in "The City in the Sea." There are twenty lines in "Sunk Lyonesse" and fifty-three in "The City in the Sea," but the imaginative content of "Sunk Lyonesse" is the richer, because it is perfect to the last syllable, while fustian abounds in Poe's version.

One more comparison may perhaps be ventured upon. The theme of "The Haunted Palace" comes into Tennyson's "Mariana," though there was no hint of it in Christina Rossetti's. Tennyson in "Mariana of the Moated Grange" is aiming at an effect similar to that often felt in De la Mare's work. He is fascinated by the far-away sound of "the moated grange." What does he see and feel? At once too much and too little for our taste, for poems like "The Listeners" have made us exorbitant in our demands.

"With blackest moss the flower-plots  
Were thickly crusted, one and all.  
The rusted nails fell from the knots  
That held the pear to the gable-wall.  
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange.  
Unlifted was the clinking latch. . . ."

This is too "real" for the dream; there is too much gardening lore and evidence of judicious manipulation of things. The latch cannot be "clinking" when it is "unlifted." One has a horrid suspicion, too, that the poet might have written "flower-pots" at first and then taking fright made them into plots. But it is a clearly visualised picture.

"After the flitting of the bats  
When thickest dark did trance the sky,  
She drew her casement-curtain by,  
And glanced athwart the glooming flats."

It is as still and clear as a pre-Raphaelite painting. If we were not concerned only with dream poetry, it would satisfy. But it has not the memory-haunting mystery of "The Dark Château," from which the poet would—

"Gaze from its high windows,  
Far down its mouldering walls,  
Where amber-clear still Lethe flows  
And foaming falls."

The poem of course must be read entire to taste its strange aroma. The lone house of "The Listeners" is more wonderful still. Yet Tennyson's aim was not much different from the living poet's. The comparison is justifiable. It could not be explained that Tennyson merely wanted to write lyrically of a dramatic moment in

*Measure for Measure.* He was caught by the magic of the phrase "Mariana of the Moated Grange" and wrote a fine lyric while his imagination vibrated with its sonority.

But for subtlety of language and directness of dream inspiration comparable to De la Mare's we turn to Coleridge, Shelley, and W. B. Yeats. Keats, except in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," like Tennyson, interrupts the dream flow with particularisation, even in the beautiful fragment on "The Eve of Saint Mark," or embodies it in a wide landscape as he does with the marvellous vision "deep in the shady sadness of a vale," or many of the passages in "Endymion." Francis Thompson, if he was not so consciously constructive as Keats, passed the dream through a closer intellectual mesh of concepts before liberating the inspiration in verbal music. William Morris was another great dreamer whose poetry is not truly the poetry of dream. Morris's clearest images came in his narratives, but even where his verse is neither diffuse nor oversimplified in diction, as in "The Haystack in the Floods," the dream effect is intermittent and is inevitably weakened by the drama of violent passions. Morris is very near to primitive epic and folk-song in his treatment of elemental passion, and in sudden presentation of clear



images his work shares with these one quality of dream poetry. It might have been expected that affinities of De la Mare and even antecedents should before now have been sought in old English and border ballads. Such things as "The Wee Wee Man" and "The Lyke-Wake" may be regarded as elemental types of the dream lyric, and therefore prototypes of all later dream lyrics; but the content of modern dream poetry is infinitely more subtle and complicated than anything so primitive, and can resemble the poignant old ballads in nothing more than strongly marked rhythm and an unworldliness of thought. Speaking of the "change of temper in regard to the supernatural which has passed over the whole modern mind," Pater, in an essay on Coleridge,<sup>1</sup> says: "The modern mind, so minutely self-scrutinising, if it is to be affected at all by a sense of the supernatural, needs to be more finely touched than was possible in the older, romantic presentment of it." The spectral apparition, for instance, is now understood to indicate the condition of the percipient's mind. "It is this finer, more delicately marvellous supernaturalism, fruit of his more delicate psychology, that Coleridge infuses into romantic adventure . . . and with a fineness of weird

<sup>1</sup> *Appreciations: Coleridge.*

effect in *The Ancient Mariner*, unknown in those older, more simple, romantic legends and ballads." To-day the mystery of dream is not readily conveyed into the romantic adventure externalised as in *The Ancient Mariner*. Only Conrad, if *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* and *Henry Brocken* are taken for granted, in our day has been able so to externalise the dream in romantic adventure, while Gordon Bottomley has succeeded in bringing it to birth in the drama. Yeats's *Shadowy Waters* is a dream poem rather than a drama. The poet concerned only with presenting the dream in its mysterious beauty of image and music is driven by our psychological sophistication to the method of the ballad without dramatic action beyond what may be implicit in a monologue. Many of Yeats's lengthy dream poems can only be explained as due to his mental isolation. The modern dream poet appeals to us, convinces us, by simple veracity to the dream inspiration. All men dream in their unconsciousness.

## CHAPTER V

### PSYCHOLOGY OF DREAM

Unconscious Dreaming—The Longing for Atonement—*The Listeners*—Regression and Disillusionment—Re-creation—The Kingdom of Heaven—The Mystery of Beauty.

THIS unconscious dreaming of the mind is a manifestation of unsatisfied desires, and dream poetry expresses in words which veil them more or less thickly the wishes which will no longer be dungeoned in the unconscious. Because the work of the modern psychologist has been applied in medical practice to abnormal cases of neurosis, a wave of repulsion to psychoanalysis seems to have swept over people's minds, rather similar to the powerful contemporary distaste of Galileo's assertions about the solar system. Desires which appear immoral and wicked are generally suppressed more rigorously than those which may seem less offensive to modern tastes and ideals of conduct. Hence most of the serious cases of neurosis which have provided the material for inquirers

like Freud bear the characteristics which are repugnant to a healthy mind. But there is no reason to suppose that the unconscious regions of human mind contain only immoral and anti-social wishes. And "immoral" is a relative term; an immoral wish unsatisfied may provide the original dynamic stimulus for the production of a poem like "Epipsychidion." Much dream poetry is amorous, and expresses directly or indirectly the desire for one of the opposite sex; but the emotional range of the mind is wider than sex in this sense. The unsatisfied wish originating a poem may be only remotely connected with sexual desire, being rather, as in the case of the eternity dream, a sense of loss, a homeless hunger for the beauty of ever-vanishing things. The tendency to dream may, therefore, belong especially to the extraordinarily sensitive and affectionate mind. It probably springs also from an unusually active, unconscious memory of a distant ancestry. A scene or a tone half remembered in daily life can trouble us profoundly. Why not, then, the unconscious inheritance of our ancestry? Must this be confined to the physical characteristics of the body and leave the soul uninfluenced? The haunting beauty of poetry like Mr. de la Mare's, its poignant personal and its outreach-

ing general meanings offer evidence against so hasty a scientific conclusion. There are certain elements in the emotion of dream, however, which throw light on much poetry.

In the day-dream there is a common emotion, the wish for companions in solitude, companions who sympathise, understand, protect the solitary heart which shrinks from the callousness of the world. This is an infantile emotion, and in the poetry of primitive peoples and of childhood it has created all "the little people" of fairyland. In one of De la Mare's best poems, "The Listeners," is clearly seen this impulse of the dream. When idealists like Dr. Strachan<sup>1</sup> examine such a poem as "The Listeners" they are apt to neglect the warm humanity, the beautiful childishness of the dream, dehumanising it into some metaphysical symbolism which agrees with the preconceptions of idealism. So Dr. Strachan finds that in "The Listeners" the poet is "the one man left awake" in our dull society, and that the poem describes the quest for beauty. The traveller "knocking on the moonlit door" is trying to rouse us to accompany him. This is all very well as a moral uplift. But the critic finds that in *The Veil and Other Poems*, the poet has "achieved this courageous type of

<sup>1</sup> In *The Soul of Modern Poetry*.



beauty in uglier material than that in which he has hitherto worked," which, of course, is irrelevant as criticism of inspired poetry, though Dr. Strachan has no doubt done valuable service in associating the finest modern poetry with social and religious idealism.

Behind the wish-fulfilment of the dream is the desire for atonement, the desire for the thing that will satisfy. Nothing could be more remote from the dream process than moral deliberation and effort. Such moral effort is something which may always be read into dream poetry in the name of religion ; to suppose that this is the same as describing the poetry is a profound but common error. It amounts to a confusion of the text with the sermon.

### THE LONGING FOR ATONEMENT

Now the longing for at-one-ment is clearly a fundamental and pervasive element in De la Mare's poetry. Earl Balfour, in *The Foundation of Belief*, claimed that the human longing for something abiding and unchanging is universal, yet we know in the real world that the apparently abiding and changeless bores us, and produces a longing for change. This is but the reverse side of the same emotion. The longing to which

Balfour refers is, psychologically, like the fierce striving for the appeasement of lust, or the periodic undulating urge towards contentment. Fundamentally it is the desire for Atonement, to be at one with Self, with God, with an ideal, with one of the other sex, with a luscious fruit, with one's class, country, ancestry, or race. According to the psychoanalyst it is, in fact, the longing for atonement (at-one-ment) with the mother, which is the undying urge in every one from birth to death, from complete separation from the mother to absorption in mother-earth. This is valuable as a figurative illustration of the dynamic source of that emotion which sets the mind vibrating in moments of inspiration. It explains why inspired language can only come from genuine feeling, and how it is that the poet gives form and countenance to the deepest desires of mankind, those desires which struggle into the twilight of dreams from the buried roots of our primitive ancestry, no less than from forgotten days of childhood. Stripped of its secondary conscious elaboration all "inspired" poetry is dream. That is why it differs from the prosaic work of the consciously selective mind in its effect and method.

What is this dream work? It is an instinctive activity of mind termed "infantile" by the

psychoanalyst. It is akin to the primitive thinking of the savage. It does not use words as symbols of intellectual concepts: it uses pictures perceived involuntarily, and the poet describes them in sounds which yield the emotional satisfaction of music. We are never secure from the siren appeal of dream. We must escape sometimes from life as it is to life as it might be. Browning understood this infantile regression of human thought, and described it vividly in "Bishop Blougram's Apology":

"Just when we're safest, there's a sunset touch,  
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,  
A chorus ending in Euripides,—  
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears  
As old and new at once as nature's self,  
To rap and knock and enter in our souls,  
Take hands and dance there a fantastic ring,  
Round the old idol on his base again—  
The grand Perhaps!"

So it is that dream poetry wakes the child in us, the child that longed, and wished, and had to give up. The lifelong and bitter process of renunciation is a universal experience, and the desire for atonement, for rounding the cape of good hope, for completing an ideal circle, for attainment of fulness and security of joy, is always there: alive and conscious, suppressed and incompletely transformed, or somnolent and

awaiting the magical kiss of liberation and ecstasy. The ecstasy is of contentment, for—strangest paradox of man's restless life—the secret of happiness is peace. The savage and the child no less than the civilised adult are unhappy. Contentment is unnatural. The Arcadian bliss of man's "state of nature" was a fanciful invention of political theorists. But against De Musset's

"Rien ne nous rend si grand qu'une grande douleur,"

must always be set the wisdom of Ecclesiasticus :

"The gladness of the heart is the life of man."

Most men understand life by flashes, or never at all. Those flashes of bright knowledge fall from the moving wings of joy. Sorrow may be likened to the shadow of these wings, revealing, but more darkly, indirectly, the shining sunlight of an enduring reality. The dream is a pursuit of satisfaction or the search for a restful sanctuary of happiness, though the mind's inhibition may distort it into nightmare. The immediate objects of this unsatisfied desire may, as we have seen, vary from the normal sexual union to that of an undiscordant solitude or a perfect communion with God. Very often the dream may come from buried memories, not of childhood, but of

that remote race-childhood of life. "No one knows through what wild centuries roams back the rose," of life. If emotion cannot find an object in real experience on which to expend itself, if it cannot attain "real" experience, in this sense, it attaches to itself representational images, and by fusion may actually create new images. This creative work may be accomplished unconsciously by the dream and may be embodied in the "magic poem," which is shaped mainly by this unconscious process. The dynamic of the poem, the impulse, the inspiration, is unsatisfied desire. This does not amount to saying that the poet of dream is a pathological case of neurosis; complete and final atonement with "that which satisfies" is not attainable in the life of any man; but, fortunately, the majority of us find enough riches in life to make us desire ever more fulness of existence, and the neurotic is, still, in a small minority. The neurotic is a person unable to make the necessary adjustment between dream and the light that *is* on sea and land. Mankind in the mass have found in art a bridge over that gulf. The poet is one of the bridge-builders. He preserves his sanity by creative expression, turning the unconscious chaos or insanity into the mould of shaping imagination.



## “ THE LISTENERS ”

Poetry like that of “ The Listeners ” has therefore a particular and individual significance for the poet, but it acquires a general (and possibly to some extent an individual) emotional meaning for the reader, because the phantasy-activity of childhood is common to us all.

“ The Listeners ” sets up a mood, a regressive trend of thought towards atonement which can be paralleled by the child’s need of its mother, known to the psychoanalysts as the mother-*imago*. Not finding the satisfaction, the peace of atonement, the seeker, so that he shall not be left alone, discovers that the very ground, the trees, the walls stir with mysterious life.

“ ‘ Is there anybody there ? ’ said the Traveller,

Knocking on the moonlit door ;

And his horse in the silence champed the grasses

Of the forest’s ferny floor :

And a bird flew up out of the turret,

Above the Traveller’s head :

And he smote upon the door a second time,

‘ Is there anybody there ? ’ he said.

But no one descended to the Traveller ;

No head from the leaf-fringed sill

Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,

Where he stood perplexed and still.

But only a host of phantom listeners

That dwelt in the lone house then

Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight

To that voice from the world of men :

Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,  
 That goes down to the empty hall,  
 Harkening in an air stirred and shaken  
 By the lonely Traveller's call.  
 And he felt in his heart their strangeness,  
 Their stillness answering his cry,  
 While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,  
 'Neath the starred and leafy sky. . . ."

These "listeners" belong to the family of  
 "the little people," the fairies, elves, gnomes,  
*presences*, that are with us in the loneliness of  
 life. In childhood these "little people" are the  
 first compensation for severance from the mother,  
 and come before the affections go out to seen,  
 heard, and felt objects.

"The Revenant" is a poem which in mood  
 is closely akin to "The Listeners," though differ-  
 ing in imagery and music. Here is the passive  
 expectancy, and the forlorn hope of regaining  
 what is lost :

"Men are all shades, O Women. Winds wist not of the  
     way they blow,  
     Apart from your kindness, life's at best but a snare.  
 Though a tongue, now past praise, this bitter thing doth  
     say, I know  
     What solitude means, and how, homeless, I fare.  
 Strange, strange are ye all—except in beauty shared with  
     her—  
     Since I seek one I loved, yet was faithless to in death.  
 Not life enough I heaped, so thus my heart must fare  
     with her,  
     Now wrapped in the gross clay, bereft of life's breath."

The peace of Atonement appears as "The Ghost" :

" Peace in thy hands,  
Peace in thine eyes,  
Peace on thy brow ;  
Flower of a moment in the eternal hour,  
Peace with me now."

### REGRESSION AND DISILLUSIONMENT

The path of the seeker comes to many disillusionments. To "The Dwelling-Place," where

" The throbbing chords of violin and lute,  
The lustre of lean tapers in dark eyes,  
Fair colours, beauteous flowers, fair-bloomed fruit  
Made earth seem Paradise.

To them that dwelt within this lonely house :  
Like children of the gods in lasting peace,  
They ate, sang, danced, as if each day's carouse  
Need never pause, nor cease."

It was but a temporary abode, for

" Yet clear above that portal plain was writ,  
Confronting each at length alone to pass  
Out of its beauty into night star-lit,  
That worn ' Alas ! ' "

But the search brings compensations. The dream is suffused with " a grave crystal light " in "The Dark Château" :

" In dreams a dark château  
Stands ever open to me,  
In far ravines dream-waters flow,  
Descending soundlessly ;

Above its peaks the eagle floats,  
Lone in a sunless sky . . .

No voice is audible. The wind  
Sleeps in its peace."

. . . . .

We are indeed in the grave crystal light of "The Vats" :

"Yet within the lightless bellies of these sarcophagi were heaped up, we were utterly assured (though *how*, I know not), floods beyond measure, of the waters for which our souls had pined. Waters imaginably so clear as to be dense, as if of melted metal more translucent even than crystal; of such a tenuous purity that not even the moonlit branches of a dream would spell their reflex in them; so costly, so far beyond price, that this whole stony world's rubies and sapphires and amethysts of Mandalay and Guadalajara and Solikamsk, all the treasure-houses of Cambalech and the booty of King Tamburlane would suffice to purchase not one drop."

"It is indeed the unseen, the imagined, the untold-of, the fabulous, the forgotten that alone lies safe from mortal moth and rust," . . . the myth-making author continues.

This is the formulated mythology. In "The

Dark Château " it is still a quest. So, too, in  
 " Arabia " :

" Sweet is the music of Arabia  
 In my heart, when out of dreams  
 I still in the thin clear mirk of dawn  
 Descry her gliding streams. . . .

They haunt me—her lutes and her forests ;  
 No beauty on earth I see,  
 But shadowed with that dream recalls  
 Her loveliness to me. . . ."

The dream is ever waiting upon the mood, and

" When music sounds, gone is the earth I know  
 And all her lovely things even lovelier grow ;  
 Her flowers in vision flame, her forest trees,  
 Lift burdened branches, stilled with ecstasies.  
 . . . . .

When music sounds, all that I was I am  
 Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came ;  
 While from Time's woods break into distant song  
 The swift-winged hours, as I hasten along."

Resurging ancestral memories mingle with the  
 dream desire.

The haunted Traveller turns upon himself in  
 " Vain Questioning." Life remains

" A livelong tangle of perplexities."

Yet only by way of life can we hope to balance  
 the account with destiny. He would find some



shadow of satisfaction in the transient but recurrent beauty of this world :

“ Leave this vain questioning. Is not sweet the rose ?  
Sings not the wild bird ere to rest he goes ?  
Hath not in miracle brave June returned ?  
Burns not her beauty as of old it burned ?  
O foolish one to roam  
So far in thine own mind away from home ! ”

So in the lovely song, “ Fare Well,” the dreamer sings :

“ Look thy last on all things lovely,  
Every hour. Let no night  
Seal thy sense in deathly slumber  
Till to delight  
Thou have paid thy utmost blessing ;  
Since that all things thou wouldst praise,  
Beauty took from those who loved them  
In other days.”

There is still room for the dream, though like a *fata Morgana* it recedes into the impossible :

“ Where blooms the flower when her petals fade,  
Where sleepeth echo by earth’s music made,  
Where all things transient to the changeless win,  
There waits the peace thy spirit dwelleth in.”

But what is the impossible ? We can think only by the employment of fictions. The art of life consists in using fiction as a means to a constantly receding and exalted goal. “ Matter is a fiction, just as much as the fundamental ideas with which the sciences generally operate

are mostly fictions. . . . The representative world is a system of fictions. It is a symbol by the help of which we orient ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

All æsthetic and religious ideals are fictions, symbolic modes of perceiving infinite truth. The attempt to understand the world finally is, as the poet tells us, “Vain Questioning,” and as the scientific thinker confirms him, “both unrealisable and foolish, for we are only trying to comprehend our own fictions. We can never solve the so-called world-riddle because what seem riddles to us are merely the contradictions we have created. Yet though the way of thinking cannot be the way of being . . . thinking always has a kind of parallelism with being. . . . Our conceptions, conventional signs, have a fictive function to perform; thinking in its lower grades is comparable to paper money, and in its higher forms it is a kind of poetry. . . . We make our own world; when we have made it awry we can remake it, approximately truer, though it cannot be absolutely true to the facts. It will never be finally made; we are always stretching forth to larger and better fictions which answer more truly to our growing knowledge and experience. . . . Man lives by imagination.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life*.

Hence the validity of the mythology of "The Vats." "It is indeed the unseen, the imagined, the untold-of, the fabulous, the forgotten that alone lie safe from mortal moth and rust."

### RE-CREATION

In the energetic playtime of the human mind is created the fabric of art. If the artist's imagination stretches forth to the long vistas of creative vision, gradually a London city arises from a few mud-huts on the marshes of the Thames, or wonder at the dawning of the sun becomes an epic of the earth. Great literature is an expression of dream perception controlled by the divine formative tendency of human intelligence. The order and relevance of the universe, as cognised by man, is freshly revealed by his imagination. Inspiration is the mystical source of this ever-renewed contribution to the heaven of our thought. The process may be explained as the eduction of a fresh relation from fragments of the poet's mental experience of life. A "magical" poem may accomplish but little creative work. To take an example, the marvellous dream of bliss of the Mulla-Mulgars and their loyal companions in peril and privation is, in itself, a piece of regressive dream

thought, a visualisation of their desire for food and comfort and security. It has a dramatic propriety in chapters xix. and xx. of *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, and is an excellent illustration of associational thought or day-dreaming. It is not dream poetry as "The Listeners" is dream poetry, for although the poet finds the materials of the monkeys' dream in his own mind, he is working artistically in a more objective manner, re-arranging the elements of experience for a dramatic purpose. But in so far as the description of the monkeys' banquet in a magically transformed world is the externalisation of the hunger and thirst of their monkey-souls, it represents regressive thought in action. If the complete story of *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, including the monkeys' mythology, is taken instead of one passage corresponding to a magical poem, a new element is obvious in the work. There has been added to the parts a unity of design which is a fresh vision of life. The dream imagery born of the interaction of the instinct and conscious control is arranged into a new synthesis by the intelligence brooding over these fragments of experience. Dream alone is not creative; but absorbed by the imagination it becomes the fabric of a new vision. The child lives in the golden age of dream; the task of his

maturity is not merely to re-tread that pathway to the lost Paradise, but to find fresh relations between the imagined and the real.

The Kingdom of Heaven is harder to reach than fairyland. It is not won by day-dreaming, for day-dreaming is achievement in phantasy of what is given up or is unattainable in life. The motive is desire for satisfaction, and how much easier is it thus to attain satisfaction at first and for a time ! In the land of heart's desire one can command fountains to spring and rivers to flow through measureless caverns ; one can build a pleasure dome, can produce trees of luscious fruitage and birds of delightful song. In that land there will be "dim-silkened, dark-haired musicians," and "wonderful, wonderful, wonderful voices" ; every wish will be fulfilled. For a time ; but if one goes too deeply into that magic wood, its trees develop arms that clutch and hold, its breezes carry the rumour of wolf-howls and the wail of women for their demon lovers. Deeper in, the animals lie ; further yet, darkness — peace, indeed — the silence of the womb or the tomb.

#### THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The poet who has too much energy to be absorbed by the dream of the lost paradise



returns sooner or later to life for new material to feed the imagination. The turning back for a renewed ascent and a fresh vision is recorded with extraordinary clearness and eloquence by De la Mare in the ode-like poem, "The Imagination's Pride," which occurs in the late volume entitled *The Veil*. This might almost be described as a conscious injunction and warning to the dreamer by himself.

"Be not too wildly amorous of the far,  
Nor lure thy fantasy to its utmost scope.  
Read by a taper when the needling star  
Burns red with menace in heaven's midnight cope.  
Friendly thy body: guard its solitude.  
Sure shelter is thy heart. It once had rest  
Where founts miraculous thy lips endewed,  
Yet naught loomed further than thy mother's breast.

O brave adventure! Ay, at danger slake  
Thy thirst, lest life in thee should, sickening, quail;  
But not toward nightmare goad a mind awake,  
Nor to forbidden horizons bend thy sail—  
Seductive outskirts whence in trance prolonged  
Thy gaze, at stretch of what is sane—secure,  
Dreams out on steeps by shapes demoniac thronged  
And vales wherein alone the dead endure."

There, goes on the warning voice, the sweet flowers and shining fruits are poisonous,

"Where sick phantasmal moonbeams brood and beat,  
And dark imaginations ripe the vine."

The child is the man, and the child's mother

is the man's God. And the power of love is left at last. There is no higher fiction in human life.

"Comfort thee, comfort thee. Thy Father knows  
How wild man's ardent spirit, fainting, yearns  
For mortal glimpse of death's immortal rose,  
The garden where the invisible blossom burns.  
Humble thy trembling knees; confess thy pride;  
Be weary. O whithersoever thy vaunting rove,  
His deepest wisdom harbours in thy side,  
In thine own bosom hides His utmost love."

The journey back to a faith-illumined life is not to be thought of as following strictly a series of chronological stages. The self of man develops in a spiral progression of phases, continually repeating past experience in new conditions. The poet cried out after the desired Unseen while in his youth, as in that sweet echo of Shelley, "The Phantom," an echo as rich as the original.

"All the world's woods, tree o'er tree,  
Come to nought.  
Birds, flowers, beasts, how transient they,  
Angels of a flying day.  
Love is quenched: dreams drown in sleep;  
Ruin nods along the deep:  
Only thou immortally  
Hauntest on  
This poor earth in Time's flux caught;  
Hauntest on, pursued, unwon,  
Phantom child of memory,  
Beauteous one!"

The music is overweighted, but obviously the inspiration is that of many later poems, and in the poem following "The Phantom," the "voices" sing in siren music their "Come!" "Seek! seek!" and "Dream!" But the poet is already the self-controlled, strong-charactered descendant of Huguenots and Scottish ministers, the Delamares and the Brownings. Already he is dissatisfied with beautiful songs of Thule and Arabia born in his visionary mood. The man of hard-won Faith, the lover of virtue, the conscientious artist, is not less evident than the sweet-voiced singer of dream in that early collection of *Poems*, 1906. There is a significance in the poet's appearance here as a writer of several fine sonnets. Read that perfect sonnet "Even in the Grave," with its assurance of the imperishable self; and his spiritual return in "The Imagination's Pride" as well as this gradual development as an artist will be seen springing out of the man who, above all, to be understood, must be envisaged as the man of virtue. In a sonnet on Virtue in an early collection of poems he announces an ethical attitude to life which is his by the intimate inheritance from his ancestors reinforced by tradition and an environment of Victorianism in childhood. The poet recognises "Virtue" as subject to

disastrous defeat. Her clear voice sings "unrelenting on"

"Of loveliest impossibilities,"

and "her struggling warriors hasten to defeat,"

"Yet, yet: O breast how cold! O hope how far!  
Grant my son's ashes lie where these men's are!"

It is the lovely dream of a noble faith, but a faith dearly bought with painful rejections of comfortable beliefs and illusions. We shall see the poet emerging into the sunlight of life again, disillusioned of all but this faith in beauty and the kingdom of heaven, a faith that is half stoical triumph over despair and half a joyful recognition of the spiritual validity of beauty. In *The Memoirs of a Midget* the poet is able to draw together the loose ends of experience, presenting now one phase, now another of his mind. There is, however, a moment early in the book which shows the author gazing back upon the past. The Midget recalls how one day when a little girl she asked her mother how God made things.

"As a young child I had been, of course, as naturally religious as a savage or an angel. . . . Once I remember in the midst of my multiplication table I had broken out unannounced with, 'Then *God* made the world, Mamma?'

" 'Yes, my dear.'

“ ‘ And all things in the forests and the birds in the sky—and moles, and this ? ’ I held down my limp coral-coloured arithmetic.

“ ‘ Yes,’ she said.

“ I wondered awhile, losing myself, as if in wanderings like Ariel’s, between the clouds. ‘ What, Mamma, did He make them of ? ’ my voice interrupted me.

“ ‘ He made them,’ said my mother steadily, ‘ of His Power and Love.’

“ Rapidly I slid back into her company. ‘ And can we, can I, make things of *my* power and love ? ’

“ ‘ I suppose, my dear,’ replied my mother reflectively, and perhaps thinking of my father in his study, over his Paper and Hops, ‘ it is only *that* in life that is really worth doing.’

“ ‘ Then,’ I said sagely, ‘ I *suspects* that’s how Mullings does the garden, Mamma.’ ”

This is beyond the province of the regressive dream. The Traveller has returned to life, rearranging the materials of experience for fresh creation, but bringing with him from the dim region the mirrors of love and beauty wherein to examine experience.

As Mr. Middleton Murry<sup>1</sup> has finely said :

“ There is no escaping that kingdom of heaven which is within you, because it is the condition

<sup>1</sup> In *Countries of the Mind* : Walter de la Mare.



of the soul's vitality. Once begin to make a choice between a worse and a better, and you are inevitably bound to recognise its validity ; and to live without making the choice, whatever the intellect may tell us, is not life at all. Life, as we know it, cannot bar the gate against the ideal. If it is a dream, it is a dream we live by, and a dream we live by is more real than a reality we ignore."

But perhaps Mr. Murry has said this a little too finely. The poet of dream does not live by his dream : he is ever trying to capture it in some magic glass. There is a continual conflict between " life as we know it " and the soul's vision, and for the man of imagination who gazes unwaveringly at existence life is a long defeat, but a defeat that may be more satisfying than the triumph of victory, for we cannot remain content with a triumph.

### THE MYSTERY OF BEAUTY

The magical poet asserting the sense of wonder before the mysteries of life saves the soul from the complacency of an illusive success ; he gives beautiful expression to the desires of the thwarted spirit. Only the objects of the poet's contemplation can alter : there are certain attitudes of the human soul which persist and which eternally

demand expression. The child is father to the man ; and the savage is father to Shakespeare. We are no longer impressed by Macaulay's generalisation that, "as civilisation advances, poetry almost necessarily declines," because science corroborates mysticism in asserting the existence of fresh Alps on Alps of mystery in the growing future. What the beauty of poetry may be is beyond our present scientific knowledge. The secret is wrapped up in the meaning of dream, and we are a long way yet from complete elucidation of this. What has been said about the expression of unfulfilled wishes is an explanation only of the emotional impulse which precedes composition, but it is no explanation of the colour and sound and form which are other elements in the beauty of poetry. And it is inadequate to explain the mysterious differences between the work of poets like W. B. Yeats, Coleridge, Shelley, Francis Thompson, Keats, De la Mare. It is inadequate unless "wish" receives a connotation inclusive of ancestral memory. But the findings of the psychoanalyst are not without literary interest as well as scientific value, and should not be permitted to make us foam at the mouth, which seems to have been, partly, their effect upon Mr. D. H. Lawrence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In *Psychology and the Unconscious*.

If anything is certain in this dark subject it is that the psychoanalyst has not yet recognised the pervasive influence of very ancient heredity in causing the liability to dream and in determining the dream's peculiar shape and atmosphere. The dreams of different people are as infinitely various and individual as the personalities of human beings. Mr. Havelock Ellis has thrown out some interesting suggestions respecting the roots of a great writer's style. These probably go far below that *ensemble* of idiosyncrasies which is generally signified by the word individuality. The mystery of De la Mare's peculiar magic affords one more case in point for Mr. Ellis's line of argument. Examining Carlyle's work, he takes this first as an example of family history in style, and then turns from the family to the race for examples of a sort of atavism in style, illustrating the force of remote ancestry overcoming the influence of education and environment.

"Shakespeare and Bacon were both Elizabethans who both lived from youth upwards in London, and even moved to some extent almost in the same circles. Yet all the influences of tradition and environment which sometimes seem to us so strong, scarcely sufficed to spread even the faintest veneer of similarity over their

style, and we could seldom mistake a sentence of one for a sentence of the other's. We almost know that Shakespeare with his gay extravagance and redundancy, his essential idealism—came of a people that had been changed in character from the surrounding stock by a Celtic infolding of the receding British to Wales. We never fail to realise that Bacon—with his instinctive gravity and temperance, the suppressed ardour of his aspiring intellectual passion, his temperamental naturalism—was rooted deep in that East Anglian soil which he had never so much as visited. In Shakespeare's veins there dances the blood of the men who made the *Mabinogion*; we recognise Bacon as a man of the same countryside which produced the forefathers of Emerson."

Mr. Ellis extends the fascinating speculation to Sir Thomas Browne, Hawthorne, and Addison.<sup>1</sup>

This line of inquiry may produce interesting results if pursued further, even if beauty remains unexplained at the last. Beauty is like the God of the mystic; it belongs to an attitude of soul evokable by art, not demonstrable by science. Hence we find that the most illuminating descriptions and definitions of poetry are in evocative language, and Coleridge-Kubla-Khan himself in a critical mood will say, "Verse is a music and the natural symbol of that union

<sup>1</sup> *The Dance of Life.*



of passion with thought and pleasure which constitutes the essence of all poetry." It is indeed the divine art of lying truthfully. If passion and thought will make a stately pleasure-dome for their fierce and bright embracement, this world of Fact is wanting in reality, and the arbiters of Truth are the beauty-makers. If we ask why reality is not on the surface of life, the response of the poet is unscientific song: "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty," and we understand him though he make the logician writhe. The beauty of poetry, like the beauty of all art, cannot be accidental: it springs from the heart of the universe, is timed to the pulse of punctual planets, and irradiated by sidereal fires. But this hidden heart of Truth, pounding huge rhythms through the universe, this unapparent reality, is momentarily discovered only by opening casements upon the foam of perilous seas. Man receives startled glimpses of unfathomed existence, and his inner vision he strives to make substantial by embodiment in too, too solid flesh. All his creative activities may be regarded as pathetically crude attempts to set up a monumental image to the unknown God. Thus is poetry born: "It is the art of the mind," as Hegel said first, "expatiating in the inner space and in the inner time of



the ideas and feelings." Passion and thought demand perfect freedom when they would embrace, and if they choose they will shatter this sorry world to build their stately pleasure-dome. Sound and colour, metaphor and simile, verse measure and prose periods, are infinitely implicated in the multiplicity of patterns woven by the poets from the fine threads of language to cast, as a bright veil, upon the fleeting form of Truth. A poem is sacred, sacrosanct, when perfect. Enjoyment of beauty is the only approach to poetry—enjoyment, and wonder, and some worship. Before entry here, common sense must doff shoes and wear a golden fillet, the critic disrobes himself of pride and prejudice. Of no use asking poets the geographical situation of Xanadu or Arabia, the genealogical tree of Kubla Khan, or the surname of that moonlit rider whose horse champed the forest's ferny floor. Coleridge will reply, "Close your eyes with holy dread," and Walter de la Mare, "The silence surged softly backward, when the plunging hoofs were gone." The universal sway of poetry over the souls of men is evidence that by a means difficult to explain it shadows forth something that is universally recognised by mankind, something so intimate that it might well be offered as a reply to Pontius

Pilate's question. The expression is individual and peculiar to the personality of the poet, but the enduring power of illumination resides in those deeps to which the poet's imagination has probed, deeps in which all humankind take root. As we have seen, the psychoanalyst can throw sidelights upon this mystery which assists an understanding of some perfect poem like "The Listeners," but the ultimate mystery of Truth or Beauty remains. If magical poems of regressive thought are not the greatest examples of creative art, they provide the fabric of these by adding to the beauty of life. For life is what we hear and read about it no less than what is witnessed or acted. The sense of Beauty is Man's least inadequate means of realising Truth, which is depth of experience, and herein lies the power of song and the truth of Shelley's dictum that the poets are the legislators of the world.

## CHAPTER VI

### POETRY OF LIFE

Beauty of Earth—"The Return" to Humanity—And to History—The Midget's World—The Short Stories—The Origin of Seaton's Aunt.

As we have seen, there are other roads than that to the Golden Age for the truth seeking self of man. There is the beauty of the world :

"Burns not her beauty as of old it burned?"

De la Mare has turned from dream to contemplate this beauty, and his poetry that comes directly from sensory experience is not less important because he lacks the photographic zeal of Tennyson. The essence of poetry is in colour and music and visionary unities, and perfect words are more than meticulous record of fact. The accuracy of De la Mare's poetry of life is psychological rather than photographic. He sees "The Willow" (in *The Veil and Other Poems*) like this :

"In mute desire she sways softly ;  
Thrilling sap up-flows ;  
She praises God in her beauty and grace,  
Whispers delight. And there flows

A delicate wind from the Southern seas,  
 Kissing her leaves. She sighs  
 While the birds in her tresses make merry ;  
 Burns the Sun in the skies."

It is impressionism, and something more. This willow is what might be called "the thing in itself." The very rhythm of the verses moves like the delicate wind in and out of her branches. And the final line—

" Burns the Sun in the skies,"

is unpausing, continuous, like the streaming sunlight.

A touch of realism startles. In "The Corner Stone,"

"The *claw* of the *tender* bird  
 Finds lodgment here."

But the images come indirectly *via* the imagination. "Before Dawn" on Christmas Day,

"Dim-berried is the mistletoe  
 With globes of sheenless grey,  
 The holly *mid ten thousand thorns*  
 Smoulders its fires away."

How intense is the objective vision in "Flotsam"! Sound and rhythm as well as colour and light are combined to express it :

"Screamed the far sea-mew. On the mirroring sands  
 Bell-shrill the oyster-catchers. Burned the sky.  
 Couching my cheeks upon my sun-scorched hands,  
 Down from bare rock I gazed. The sea swung by.

Dazzling dark blue and verdurous, quiet with snow,  
Empty with loveliness, with music a-roar,  
Her billowing summits heaving noon-aglow—  
Crashed the Atlantic on the cliff-ringed shore.”

If that is impressionism, Shakespeare often is impressionistic.

The poet in this mood does not confine his gaze to inanimate nature. He looks upon miserable man, “In the Dock,” and sees

“The world’s grimed thumb,  
Now hooked securely in his matted hair.”

He remembers the “poisonous slum” from which the prisoner has been dragged like a netted fish before the Justice which pants for carrion. The droning voices in the court are erecting a timber framework in the murderer’s darkening brain. And

“Sudden like wolf he cries ; and sweats to see  
When howls man’s soul, it howls inaudibly.”

### “THE RETURN”

With something of the same objective manner mingled with memory, the skilfully made novel, *The Return*, was written. This subtle description of a spiritual crisis in a man’s development pivots upon an occurrence smacking of melodrama, reminding a reader of some of Edgar Allan Poe’s rather crude machinery. A man,



Arthur Lawford, falls asleep in the churchyard of Widderstone village beside the tomb of a long-dead individual whose more sensual and magnetic personality takes gradual possession of the living man. His appearance, his very figure and physiology is so startlingly changed when he returns home that his doubting wife resolves to repudiate him. Excepting this touch of melodrama, the story convinces by its rapid psychology; and its realism in detail is sheathed by an envelope of ghostliness. It is packed with direct observation and careful description as well as entrancing speculations on psychic mysteries. And as the tale develops, Lawford's wife Sheila; Mr. Bethany, the old vicar; the unpleasant Danton; the recluse Herbert, and even the ghostly Sabathier, come to a surging warmth of humanity that might not have been expected from the visionary author of "The Moon's Miracle"—except that the Count in that story was delineated with such lifelike strokes. The fact is that, burdened with dreams though he has been, Mr. de la Mare has never for long remained unconcerned with the infinite ways of the human heart. He can mingle the phantastic and the human with rare skill. What has been termed the melodramatic touch in *The Return* might as well have been regarded as an intrusion of the

fairy-tale. *The Return* is really a fairy-tale with a modern setting. A fairy-tale is not made merely by describing the impossible (however unpleasant the impossible may be). Hence one does not create anything fresh in the fairy-tale by composing in an artificially naive manner a sort of pseudo-phantastic story which offends the imagination instead of inspiring it. Such things are produced by sophisticated artifice designed only to intrigue the reader with novelty of experiment. The fairy-tale tells of a miracle, but of a miracle which obeys moral laws or poetic laws when it discards the laws of the physical world. A conviction of truth or justice inheres in the true fairy-tale; and it is in this sense that *The Return* carries the reader forward into imaginative conviction. The author passes in this way from dream poetry to humanity *via* the fairy-tale.

Continuous with the road towards humanity, or perhaps parallel with it, is the pursuit of "Vain Questionings" about this "livelong tangle of perplexities." In the poem, "A Sign," the question is

"How shall I know that the end of things is coming?

The stars in their stations will shine glamorous in the  
black;

Emptiness, as ever, haunt the great Star Sack;

And Venus, proud and beautiful, go down to meet the day,  
Pale in phosphorescence of the green sea spray—  
How shall I know that the end of things is coming ? ”

Sometimes resignation is the answer. The foot-sore Wanderer is bidden welcome to the Inn at the sign of the “ Rising Sun ” and of “ The World’s End.” There “ pain languidly sports with the hours,” and “ sleep beyond dreams ” is promised to the weary.

“ Ghosts may be ours ; but gaze thou not too closely,  
If haply in chill of the dark thou rouse to see  
One silent of foot, hooded, and hollow of visage,  
Pause, with secret eyes, to peer out at thee.

He is the Ancient Tapster of this Hostel,  
To him at length even we all keys must resign ;  
And if he beckon, Stranger, thou too must follow—  
Love and all peace be thine.”

There is that strange poem, “ The Wanderers ” :

“ Within my mind two spirits strayed  
From out their still and purer air,  
And there a moment’s sojourn made ;  
As lovers will in woodlands bare.”

He heard their silence breathe love as flowers might say “ such our fragrance,” or a dewdrop at dawn, “ Thus I beam.” The spirits are radiant in joy and peace.

“ So in a gloomy London street  
Princes from Eastern realms might pause  
In secret converse, then retreat.

Yet without haste passed these from sight ;  
As if a human mind were not  
Wholly a dark and dismal spot—  
At least in their own light.”

Death is charged with being “ The Quiet Enemy,”  
but denies it, since he will take the place of  
time :

“ Walk in beauty. Vaunt thy rose,  
Flaunt thy transient loveliness.  
Pace for pace with thee there goes,  
A shape that hath not come to bless.  
I, thine enemy ? . . . Nay, nay.  
I can only watch and wait,  
Patient, treacherous time away,  
Hold ajar the wicket gate.”

The curiosity of the returned traveller is  
never at rest. Intimations still haunt him of  
more things that are dreamed of in the philo-  
sophy of the senses. Experience is ever hinting  
of secrets. “ Who’s that ? ” <sup>1</sup> records a moment  
of clairaudient suspense. There is a sudden  
interlocution of three “ Strangers ” on the misty  
hills. “ Who walks with us ? ” they ask, but the  
only answer comes from a Wild Bird :

*Ay ! . . . Aye ! . . . Ay !*

It is an approach to the apprehensive mood of  
the savage, of the superstitious primitive mind

<sup>1</sup> In *The Veil and Other Poems*.

in all of us. The reader is at liberty to find in such a fragment what he will. The three Strangers may be regarded as three grades of consciousness in a single individual, and the Wild Bird as the half-revealed, elusive meaning of "nature." When poetry touches the bed-rock of primitive thought it is always about to come full circle round to our most subtle psychological refinements on the inexplicable.

And in pursuing this curiosity metaphysical questions are approached. The poet walks in a "sea-lulled lane" where the air of a spring noon is shimmering. He hears a chaffinch, a robin; observes the new tones of green; sees a butterfly lured out of sight "at sigh of the warm South wind"; the sunshine seems to purpose making him share with the earth its light and life. But

"O restless thought  
Contented not. With 'why' distraught.  
Whom asked you then your riddle small?—  
'If hither came no man at all

'Through this grey-green, sea-haunted lane,  
Would it mere blackened nought remain?  
Strives it this beauty and life to express  
Only in human consciousness?'

Oh, rather idly breaks he in  
To an Eden innocent of sin;  
And, prouder than to be afraid,  
Forgets his Maker in the made."



The sum of such "restless thought" is but "Futility." He bids his strange heart sink to its rest.

"All this—thy world—an end shall make;  
Planet to sun return again;  
The universe, to sleep from wake,  
In a last peace remain.

Alas, the futility of care  
That, spinning thought to thought, doth weave  
An idle argument on the air  
We love not, nor believe."

So his conclusion in answer to Moneta's searching "Catechism" is insistence on the companionship of a dream when "the night comes." Has he nothing but "worn-out songs of moon and rose"? He is too weary to answer, but:

"Cracked my voice, and broken my wing."

"'Tell'st thou no truth of the life that *is*  
Seek'st thou from Heaven no pitying sign?'  
'Ask thine own heart these mysteries,  
Not mine.'

. . . . .

'Fool. The night comes. . . . 'Tis late. Arise.  
Cold lap the waters of Jordan's stream!  
'Deep be their flood, and tranquil thine eyes  
With a dream.'"

The voice is not cracked but it no longer

entrances. Such perplexities, resolutely faced, do not belong to dream. The dreamer is driven back at last upon beauty as his faith in life. Here is a buckling-on of the armour of courage, a readjustment of the waking mind to external verities. But the minstrel can still call magic from his harp. The universe "in a last sleep" may still drop out of argument and becomes embodied in a dream of "Sunk Lyonesse."

But this dream was dreamed *en route* to death and life, and the new mood is not exhausted with the objective observation and the metaphysical speculations of *The Return* and the poems in *The Veil* collection.

There is yet another wide stretch of country for the inward seeking self of man who has cast aside the dreaming of childhood. This is the regretted past of memory, not the lost paradise or the Golden Age of the world, for such is once more the goal of Henry Brocken and of the Traveller "Knocking on the moonlit door." This fresh ground which the artist has occupied belongs to the world of our parents or grandparents, to "the good old days" just distant enough to gain an atmosphere that is at least half enchantment, and near enough to preserve recognisable landmarks of things as they are. It is

to be distinguished from much modern poetry and fiction which is either an excursion into the future, romance in the guise of science, or a travelling back to the youth of the race, as in many poems of this bewildered century, where, although the goal may appear different, the route is parallel with the way to "Arabia." It is nearer to Mr. G. K. Chesterton's crusading sorties into the Middle Ages, and Sir James Barrie's wistful watching of *Quality Street*. Writers like these merely remember what they wish to remember. There is, however, a scientific, a historical, a controversial basis in fact for their romantic structures. This, then, is the direction of much of the later prose work of De la Mare. He finds some compensation for the robberies of time in allying history, even biography, even autobiography, with the artistic aim of creating characters and telling stories. And by this means he obtains the emotional impulse which has charged his prose fiction of life with the spirit and the music of poetry. It is his peculiar merit and perhaps peril that he must always remain a poet of dream.

#### THE MIDGET'S WORLD

In many of the short stories belonging to *The Riddle* volume and in the *Memoirs of a*

*Midget*, the reader is conscious of a restful *couleur de rose* and a half-remembered perfume of lavender pervading the domestic interiors. The middle and late Victorian age is reflected in the diminishing mirror of memory. *The Memoirs of a Midget* except that its language, like a blade burning its scabbard, makes it almost too highly charged for the novel form, might be considered a continuation in time of the worlds of *Pride and Prejudice* and of *Wuthering Heights*. "Different worlds!" one might exclaim. But the *Memoirs* holds them both, at a point in time about half a century nearer to us. The story is dated first in chapter vii., when the Midget's nursemaid, Pollie, is interpreting a dream of pears for her tiny charge. The Midget's dream denotes that she will marry a person far above her in rank ("lords and such-like, miss, if you please"). . . .

" 'Then, Pollie,' said I, 'there's nothing for it but to open a butcher's shop. For live in great state I can't and won't, not if the Prince of Wales himself was to ask me in marriage.'

" 'Lor', miss,' retorted Pollie, in shocked accents, 'and him a married man with grown-up sons and all.' "

The intense poetry and tragedy of the Midget's

life was possible only because of her creator's artistic reticence regarding irrelevant matters which must have loomed large in those days. He has further purged his narrative of the pervasive problems which have coloured the thoughts and aspirations of the present age. This is, of course, tantamount to passing a verdict of romanticism on much of his later work ; on stories like "Lispert, Lispett and Vaine," "The Tree" (such an heroic presentation of the artist as appears in "The Tree" does not belong to this age), "The Looking-Glass," "The Bird of Travel," "The Count's Courtship," "The Almond Tree," no less than *The Return* and *The Memoirs of a Midget*. If other than internal evidence of Mr. de la Mare's artistic possession of this second sanctuary for his genius is required, it can be found by reference to Jane Conolly's *Old Days and Ways* in which again and again occur the crude facts which became material for the artist's romantic atmosphere. This fiction of De la Mare's is quite plainly the expression of a loyalty if not a nostalgia for the abandoned past. The mood is akin to the "infantile regression" of thought which is the stuff of dream poetry, though its manifestation is clothed with a more elaborate conscious structure of historical and lifelike detail. It is less personal, more con-



structive. There is this atmosphere of family legends and genealogies ; of homely wives and rather oppressed but well-trained children ; of steadfast servants and houses which are homes ; of lace, lavender, and loyalties, of great little joys and tragedies, in his later fiction. If one side of his genius harks back to the seventeenth century ; to the English romantic revival ; and to the eclectic pre-Raphaelites, the other, and more human side, originating in an innate moral Puritanism, is a refinement and apotheosis of Victorianism—of all that was sound and durable in Victorianism. The wicked lady-killing and lawless Sabathier in *The Return* plainly derives much of his fearfulness from something in his creator, a subjective hatred of the *alter ego*.

The Midget's memories live in a pleasantly old-fashioned atmosphere. She remembers her "first 'steam-monster' entering the station" ; her "books of knowledge" as a child included *The Observing Eye ; or Lessons to Children on the Three Lowest Divisions of Animal Life : The Radiated, The Articulated, and Molluscs*, and Mr. Clodd's *The Childhood of the World*. There are gold sovereigns ; a hot possett ; Miss Fenne, whose correspondence was seamed with scriptural texts, and her Christmas present of "a little Catechism sewn up in a pink silk cover." Again :

“ It was a mournful day when my grandfather returned to France never to be seen by me again. Yet he was to remember me always ; and at last when I myself had forgotten even my faith in his fidelity. Nearly all my personal furnishings and belongings were gifts of his from France, and many of them of his own making. There was my four-post bed, for instance, with a flowered silk canopy, a carved tester, and half a dozen changes of linen and valance. There were chairs to match, a wardrobe, silk mats from Persia, a cheval-glass, and clothes and finery in abundance, china and cutlery, top-boots and sabots. Even a silver-hooped bath-tub and a crystal toilet-set. . . . I learnt to tell the time from an eight-day clock, which played a sacred tune at matins and vespers . . . a two-chambered thatched summer-house, set up on a pole, and reached by a wide, shallow ladder. The roof opened, so that on very hot days a block of ice could be laid within, the water from its slow melting running out by a gutter. . . . ”

Her furniture was “ of plain old Sheraton design . . . ”

“ Fortunately our high plain house stood up in a delightful garden, sloping this way and that towards orchard and wood, with a fine-turfed lawn, few ‘ cultivated ’ flowers, and ample drifts of shade. If Kent is the Garden of England,

then this was the garden of Kent. . . . A stream of water ran on the southern side all the length of the garden, under a high rocky bank (its boundary) which was densely overhung with ash and willow, and hedges of brier and bramble looped with bindweed, goose-grass, and traveller's joy. On the nearer bank of this stream which had been left to its wild, I would sit among the mossy rocks and stones and search the green tops of my ambush as if in quest of Paradise.

"When the sun's rays beat down too fiercely on my head I would make myself an umbrella of wild angelica or water parsnip."

The admirer of the poet's verse will not need to be reminded that the Midget's garden, or at least its fragrances, enter many of the poems. And the Midget's biography continues in a vein equally significant :

"Caring little for playthings, and having my smallest books with me chiefly for silent company, I would fall into a day-dream in a world that in my solitude became my own. In this fantastic and still world I forgot the misadventure of my birth, which had now really begun to burden me, forgot pride, vanity, and chagrin ; and was at peace. . . .

"My eyes dazzled in colours. The smallest of the marvels of flowers and flies and beetles and pebbles, and the radiance that washed over

them, would fill me with a mute pent-up rapture almost unendurable. Butterflies would settle quietly on the hot stones beside me as if to match their raiment against mine. . . . As for the noise of the water, it was so full and limpid, yet made of up such infinitely entangled chimings and drummings, that it would lull me into a kind of trance. . . .

“What may wholly have been another childish fancy was that apart from the silvery darting flies and the rainbow-coloured motes in the sunbeams, fine and airy invisible shapes seemed to haunt and hover around me when all was still. . . .”

In *The Memoirs*, Pollie the nursemaid, and Mrs. Ballard the cook ; Mrs. Bowater, the landlady, and Fanny, her daughter, a fay-like and incomprehensible creature ; blue-blooded yet bourgeois Mrs. Monnerie, “whose whims were far more vigorous than most people’s principles” ; Mr. Crimble ; Sir Walter Pollacke, Adam Waggett, and the minor luminaries, are individuals whose world is clearly contemporaneous with Dickens and Thackeray. But the ego-centric little Midget’s story is not concerned much with the moil and dust of the big outer world, whether of the slums or of high society. The characters that come into her life become acclimatised to this rarefied air and are living in the mind of the



reader before the tale is done. The very correspondence of Miss Fenne, Pollie, or Fanny, lures the reader further into her world. Pollie writes to thank the Midget for her wedding presents—a cradle for Pollie and a chest of tools for her husband. The letter is exactly right :

“ DEAR MISS M.,—We was mother and all very sorry and grieved you couldn’t come though it passed off very satisfactory. As for forgetting please don’t mention the word, Lyndsey have never been the same since the old house was empty. It all passed off very satisfactory though with such torrents of rain there was a great pool in the churchyard which made everybody in high spirits. And William and I can’t thank you enough for those beautiful gifts you have sent us. Will have been a carpenter since he was a boy but there’s things there miss he says he never heard on in his born days but will be extraemly useful when he comes to know what for. And Mother says it was just like your kind heart to think of what you sent me. You can’t think how handsome it looks in the new-papered room and I’m sure I hope if I may say so it may be quite as useful as Will’s tools, and its being pretty late to marry it isn’t as if I was a slip of a girl. And of course I have Mother. Though if any does come you may be sure it will be a Sunday treat being too fine for ordinary.

“ Please God miss I hope you are keeping



well and happy in your new surroundings and that dream will come true. It was a dreadful moment that day by the shops but I'm thankful all came well. If you ever writes to Mrs. B. I trust you will mention me to her kindly not being much of a letter-writer. If you could have heard the things she said of you your ears would burn miss you were such a treasure and to judge from her appearance she must have seen her troubles. And being a married woman helps to see into things though thank God I'm well and happy and William hopes to keep me so.

"Well I must now close trusting that you are in the best of health. Your old Pollie.

"Miss Fenne have been very poorly of late so I've heard though not yet took to her bed—more peculiar than ever about Church and such like. Adam Waggett being W.'s oldest friend though not my choice was to have been Best Man but he's in service in London and couldn't come."

The *Memoirs*, however, are as far as possible from realism, notwithstanding the delicately true reproduction of places and people, of dialogue and thought-play. The Midget herself is a creation of the poetic imagination. She lives on the level of tragic poetry. The little tributaries of her memories do but feed the mysterious drama of human destiny. She is of

phenomenal minuteness, and so is her pitiful lover Mr. Anon, but their souls reflect much intensely in little: they also are diminishing mirrors inside the great diminishing mirror of the book, or of the author's imagination, which has envisaged them and their environmental epoch in England. Only romantic fiction that is half poetry could credit a heroine with such powers, not only of literary expression but of subtle perception and speculation, as the Midget displays. The *Memoirs* are seamed with full-charged words and sentences like these:

“Pollie carried me downstairs, and we took a sober whispering walk in the hush and perfumes of the deserted garden. Loud rang the tongues of the water over the stones. The moths were fluttering to their trysts, and from some dark little coign the cricket strummed me a solo. Standing up there in the starry night the great house looked down on me like an elder brother, mute but compassionate.”

The Midget recalls how, during her stay with Mrs. Bowater, she went out secretly at night to watch the stars from a wooded heath. But her poetry!

“My next bout of star-gazing presaged disaster. I say star-gazing; for it is true that

I stole out after honest folk are abed only when the heavens were swept and garnished. But, as a matter of fact, my real tryst was with another Self. Had my lot been different, I might have sought that self in Tierra del Fuego or Malay, or in a fine marriage. Mine was a smaller world. Bo-peep I would play with shadow and dew-bead. And if Ulysses, as my father had read me, stopped his ears against the Sirens, I contrariwise unsealed mine to the ethereal airs of that bare wintry solitude.

“The spectral rattle of the parched beech-leaves on the saplings, the faintest whisper in the skeleton bracken, set me peeping, peering, tippeting; and the Invisibles, if they heeded me, merely smiled on me from their grave all-seeing eyes. . . .

“Love for the frosty, star-roofed woods, that was easy. And yet what if—though easy—it is not enough? I had lingered on, talking in my childish fashion—a habit never to leave me—to every sudden lovely morsel in turn, when, to my dismay, I heard St. Peter’s clock toll midnight. Was it my fancy that at the stroke, and as peacefully as a mother when she is alone with her sleeping children, the giant tree sighed, and the whole night stilled as if at the opening of a door? I don’t know, for I would sometimes pretend to be afraid merely to enjoy the pretending. And even my small Bowater astronomy had taught me that as the earth has her poles and equator,

so these are in relation to the ecliptic and the equinoctial. So too, then, each one of us—even a mammet like myself—must live in a world of the imagination which is in everlasting relation to its heavens.”

Her reflections often rise to this altitude. Early in the *Memoirs* she is considering, in the manner of Swift, the importance of bodily size. She had been tempted to blame her parents for her pigmy stature.

“What wicked folly—they did not choose their only child. After all, too, fellow-creatures of any size seem much alike. They rarely have *nothing* to blame Providence for—the length of their noses or the size of their feet, their bones or their corpulence, the imbecilities of their minds or their bodies, the ‘accidents’ of birth, breeding, station, or circumstance. Yet how secure and perhaps wholesome is Man’s self-satisfaction. To what ideal does he compare himself but to a self-perfected abstraction of his own image? Even his Venus and Apollo are mere flattering reflections of his own he—or she—shapes. And what of his anthropomorphic soul?”

She rivals the cleverness of a George Meredith creation, and surpasses it in poetry :

“No sylphs of the air, no trancing music out of the waters now! It was as if the past were

surrounded with a great wall ; and the future clear and hard as glass. You might explore the past in memory : you couldn't scale its invisible walls."

On another occasion :

" I could only comfort myself with remembering that we should soon meet again, and the future might be kinder. Well, sometimes the future is kinder, but it is never the same thing as the past."

To begin reading the short stories in *The Riddle* volume after the *Memoirs* is like travelling a little way in place but not at all in time. " The Almond Tree," " The Count's Courtship," and " Miss Duveen " are all told through the sensitive mind of a child. When, as in " The Almond Tree," the narrator is an adult, the story is a reconstruction of his childhood. " Miss Duveen " opens :

" I seldom had the company of children in my grandmother's house beside the river Wandle " ;

and the story is again a retrospective account of childhood, but besides the delicately etched environment there is the desolate cruelty of poor Miss Duveen's fate.



“ ‘I, you know,’ she said suddenly, raising her little piercing eyes to mine, ‘I am Miss Duveen, that’s not, they say, quite the thing here.’ She tapped her small forehead again beneath the two sleek curves of her greying hair, and made a long narrow mouth at me. ‘Though, of course,’ she added, ‘we do not tell *her* so. No!’ ”

The callous relief of the little boy, Miss Duveen’s only friend, when the old lady is taken away at last to an asylum, is a climax of psychological truth, leaving no possible addition to the reader’s realisation of a human being’s complete isolation. “But I know now that the news,” concludes the narrator, “in spite of a vague sorrow, greatly relieved me. I should be at ease in the garden again, came the thought—no longer fear to look ridiculous, and grow hot when our neighbour was mentioned, or be saddled with her company beside the stream.”

These stories have just the same foundation in fact and memory as the novels, however generalised the facts and transformed the incidents. The understanding of a boy’s mind disclosed in “The Bowl,” for example, the very atmosphere of the domestic interior, is contained in the author’s memory as well as in the range and minuteness of his acquired knowledge. “The

Almond Tree " combines superbly these elements of what perhaps may be described, with this limited connotation, as objective and subjective perception. It is the account of the impression made on a boy's mind by the conjugal disruption of his parents' lives. There is no almond tree in the story, unless it be the boy's father, one of those unhappy temperaments who cannot get adjusted to life. He kills himself and his dead body is found by his little son. The story ends with the birth of a second son to his widow, brother of the narrator. The almond tree bears its blossoms and casts them off before its spring-green leaves arrive. Perverse human nature, self-tortured, impatient, often does the same. The story is infinitely pathetic, but never within a thousand miles of sentimentality. When the little boy finds his father stretched along the snow he

"felt no sorrow, but stood beside the body, regarding it only with deep wonder and a kind of earnest curiosity, yet perhaps with a remote pity, too, that he could not see me in the beautiful morning. His grey hand lay arched in the snow, his darkened face, on which showed a smear of dried blood, was turned away a little as if out of the oblique sunshine. I understood that he was dead, was already loosely speculating on what

changes it would make ; how I should spend my time ; what would happen in the house now that he was gone, his influence, his authority, his discord. I remembered too that I was alone, was master of this immense secret, that I must go home sedately, as if it were a Sunday, and in a low voice tell my mother, concealing any exultation I might feel in the office."

But when Martha Rodd arrives to interrupt his morbid dreams—

" ' Look, Martha, look,' I cried, ' I found him in the snow ; he's dead.' And suddenly a bond seemed to snap in my heart. The beauty and solitude of the morning, the perfect whiteness of the snow—it was all an uncouth mockery against me—a subtle and quiet treachery."

It is only necessary to remember attending as a child the funeral of a loved one in winter to feel the exquisite justice of all this. Beyond this umbra of the story once more there is a penumbra of unemotional but acute observation. Martha Rodd, Mrs. Ryder, Mrs. Marshall, even Miss Grey, an almost innocent contributor to the marital tragedy, are sharply realised subsidiary characters. The author is always using his senses. The narrator of " The Bowl " makes the pregnant remark :

“ Yet in my heart of hearts I was perfectly sure that Mrs. Orchardson’s little baby would *not* die. I cannot tell whence this assurance came. It may have been the fruit of a child’s natural intuition; or even of his exquisite insight—experienced, as it would seem, to see through, and not only on the surface.”

### SEATON’S AUNT

Among the Midget’s sapient asides she remarks somewhere that by merely gazing at an object the eye can be made to tell one more about it than is obvious or even visible. And it is doubtless this faithfulness to life which has caused the author to work so well a small plot. Characters, reflections, scenery, even of houses and gardens, seem to satisfy his artistic requirements many times over. The inscrutable and dreadful old lady who is Seaton’s Aunt, to take a prominent example, appears in many various guises and degrees of dreadfulness. Mrs. Monnerie, “ whose whims were far more powerful than other people’s principles,” is surely the same with her “ restless, darting mind ” which “ lay hidden behind the great mask of her countenance, with its heavy-lidded eyes and tower of hair. She loved to sit indolently peering, musing, and gossiping, twiddling the while

perhaps some little antique toy in her capacious lap. I can boast, at any rate, that I was a spellbound listener, and devoured her peculiar wandering, satirical talk . . .” says the Midget. And no doubt, Jimmie’s Aunt Charlotte in *Out of the Deep*, were we shown more of her, would develop a striking family resemblance. Jimmie at least recalls an occasion when “he stood before his Aunt’s footstool to bid her good-night, her aggrieved pupils had visibly swum down from beneath their lids out of a nap, to fix themselves and look at him at last as if neither he nor she, either in this or in any other world, had ever so much as seen one another before.”

And she asks him : “ You have nothing on your conscience, I trust ? ”

Who else would have asked that in that way ? But, of course, the finality of dreadfulness in the old lady belongs immortally to Seaton’s Aunt, not only for her voice and appearance :

“ Her face was set in a deep reverie beneath the shadow of a big loose sun-hat. It was deeply lined, crooked, and, in a way I can’t describe, fixedly vacant and strange. I coughed, and she turned at once with a prodigious smile. . . . ”



Not only because of this face which "was like a dense and involved accompaniment to her talk"; "her long face and big head," and "the immense coils of her hair"; but rather for the horrid certainty which the story leaves that she was a monstrous creature, a glutton not only physically but psychically, a vampire who robbed her nephew of his life with no more violence than a spider's when it is sucking a fly empty. And her reticence was worse than her racy, satirical talk. "Her flashes of silence" were for the unfortunate Seaton. When the story ends she is already half a ghost, albeit a very evil ghost. She is completely a ghost in Jane Conolly's *Old Days and Ways*. The comparison is full of interest. Jane Conolly is relating family histories. She tells how the cousin of a celebrated Mrs. Knollys, Mr. Marmion Ferrers, saw the terrible old lady who haunted the family seat of Rainham.

"He was staying there for the shooting and went up to dress for dinner. His room was in a long corridor connected with the rest of the house by a swing door. When he had gone through this door, a lady hurried past him in a rustling silk dress, and carrying a bedroom candlestick in her hand. Mr. Ferrers took little notice beyond seeing the lady walk

to the end of the corridor and disappear into one of the rooms. He thought it probably one of the ladies in the house visiting the nurseries. That night, going to bed, a gentleman who slept in another room in the same corridor went up with Mr. Ferrers. The same lady passed them, and Mr. Ferrers found himself dragged into one of the deep doorways by his friend, and as soon as the lady passed he was hurried by him to follow her. They were quick, but she was quicker. She reached the farthest door on the right-hand side, opened it, went in, and holding the candle so that it shone on her face, looked at them with so evil and vindictive an expression that they were both horrified. Then she shut the door violently. One thing that struck them both was, that though the door was evidently shut with force, there was no sound.

“ ‘What does all this mean?’ Mr. Ferrers asked.

“ ‘It is the wretched woman that haunts the place,’ was the reply. ‘Don’t mention it to Lord Townsend. He cannot bear any allusion to it.’ ”

The next day Mr. Ferrers was examining the picture gallery of the house with Lord Townsend when, “quite forgetting what his friend told him,” he said :

“ ‘That’s the old lady I saw last night.’ ”

“ ‘ Have you seen that accursed woman ? ’

“ Then Mr. Ferrers told what he had seen. Lord Townsend went with him to the corridor and tried to open the door of the room she had gone into.”

The door was eventually opened by a blacksmith, “ only to show a dark room, thick with the dust of years, the furniture mouldering, the curtains and heavy bed-hangings in threads.”

The evil apparition, says Miss Conolly, appeared once more when Lord Townsend was on his death-bed, and haunted the place by day as well as night. Mrs. Knollys related to Miss Conolly how she went there to say good-bye to the dying Lord, and

“ she rushed past me, almost touching me, her dress making a most curious rustling sound. Then as she passed me I got a breath of cold, horrid air. . . .” “ At the last,” says Mrs. Knollys, “ my husband hoped she would leave the poor man in peace ; but no—as he was reading a prayer by the bedside over the departing soul, he saw a strange expression on Lord Townsend’s face. He looked round, and there, between his son and daughter-in-law, who were leaning on the foot of the bed, was the evil

face of this woman grinning at the dying man."

Mrs. Knollys, it is also interesting to recall, had a house at Charlton, Mr. de la Mare's birth-place.

## CHAPTER VII

### DE LA MARE'S GHOSTS

Ghosts and Ghostliness—*Out of the Deep* and *The Turn of the Screw*—The Dream and the Ghost—*Crossings*—  
“Drugged.”

WAS it not William James who said that every hallucination was as genuine a perception as when a real object happened to cause it? Only the object happened not to be there. It is very far outside the scheme of this chapter to examine pros and cons and decide on the question of the objectivity of ghosts. In prose fiction the modern tendency towards psychological refinement corresponds to the change noted by Pater which passed over poetry of the supernatural. We are persuaded best to see ghosts by the writer who is careful to show them to us through the mental window of the haunted person. The highest economy of material is needful in making the reader visualise the ghost, or it will be too solid for ghostliness. De la Mare's verbal artistry is nowhere displayed more unerringly



than in producing both the ghost and the proper atmosphere for it to breathe. He can give us a ghost story without the ghost, when he wills. But Seaton's Aunt is very nearly a ghost, and as we have seen she is descended from a fully bloodless ghost. But this may be inverting the true sequence! Should we not believe that Seaton's Aunt proves the possibility of the ghost of Rainham? A story like the *Looking-Glass* is ghostly, but disappointing in its climax. The reader is induced to expect prodigious events in Alice's garden. It was too bad of the author to finish with Alice's death after allowing us to overhear "that thick, coarse, privy voice" of Sarah saying, "And what you've got to look for"—to the wool-gathering, consumptive girl, not to speak of the conditions of Alice's vigil in the garden. There is so much ghostliness wasted in this story.

The superstitious and loquacious Sarah "gazed on impenetrably at Alice's slender fingers. And without raising her eyes she leaned her large hands on the wall. 'Meself, Miss, meself's *my* ghost, as they say. Why, bless me! it's all thro' the place now like smoke.'

"What was all through the place now like smoke Alice perceived to be the peculiar clarity of the air discernible in the garden at times.

The clearness as it were of glass, of a looking-glass, which conceals all behind and beyond it, returning only the looker's wonder, or simply her vanity, or even her gaiety. Why, for the matter of that, thought Alice smiling, there are people who look into looking-glasses, actually see themselves there, and yet never turn a hair.

"There wasn't any glass, of course. Its sort of mirage sprang out of the desire of her eyes, out of a restless hunger of the mind."

Yet we expect more than her last long sleep on the eve of the long-awaited May Day when she was to keep watch in the haunted garden. Something wonderful ought to have happened in her mind, as it happened in Jimmie's mind in *Out of the Deep*, wonderful as this but not dreadful—beautiful rather than dreadful. The utmost vouchsafed to us is that

"gradually a curious happiness at last descended upon her heart, like a cloud of morning dew in a dell of wild flowers. It seemed, in moments like these, as if she had been given the power to think—or rather to be conscious, as it were, of thoughts not her own—thoughts like vivid pictures, following one upon another with extraordinary rapidity and brightness through her mind. As if, indeed, thought could be like fragments of glass, reflecting light at their every

edge and angle. She stood tiptoe at the meadow wall and gazed greedily into the green fields and across to the pollard aspens by the waterside. Turning, her eyes recognised clear in the shadow and blue-grey air of the garden her solitude—its solitude. And at once all thinking ceased.

“ ‘ The spirit is *me* : *I* haunt this place ! ’ she said aloud, with sudden assurance.”

When the author's chief character is at such pains to explain that it is not, never was meant for a ghost-story, we can only shake off as speedily as possible the insidious influence he has been throwing over us with his artful words—as artfully suggestive as Sarah's own.

Truly there is no lack of exciting things coming up *Out of the Deep*. Long before the ghost-butler's first response to Jimmie's bell-pull, we know that Jimmie's state of mind is capable of transforming that deserted London mansion bequeathed to him by his uncle and aunt. The house *was* rather queer with its jostling crowds of *objets d'art*. See how the story at the very opening puts the reader in Jimmie's shoes :

“ The steely light of daybreak, increasing in volume and intensity as the East grew larger with the day, showed clearly at length that the

prodigious yet elegant Arabian bed was empty. What might tenderly have cradled the slumbers of some exquisite Fair of romance now contained no human occupant at all. The whole immense room—its air dry and thin as if burnt—was quiet as a sepulchre.

“To the right of the bed towered a vast and heavily carved wardrobe. To the left, a lofty fireplace of stone flanked by its grinning frigid dogs. A few cumbrous and obscure oil paintings hung on the walls. And, like the draperies of a proscenium, the fringed and valanced damask curtains on either side the two high windows, poured down their motionless cataract of crimson.

“They had been left undrawn over night, and yet gave the scene a slight theatricality, a theatricality which the painted nymphs disporting themselves on the ceiling scarcely helped to dispel.”

Thus the room, now untenanted, where Jimmie had slept for about six weeks, seeing nobody in the house but the daily charwoman, Mrs. Thripps. And there were memories of his boyhood in the big solemn house; they come back to him and so into the reader's mind, too. “The first absurd impulsive experiment” of pulling the bell-rope just to convince himself that no one, not even servants were in the house would, in its dreadful result, have not shaken him up

so, the result would have been "less unexpected if he hadn't made a point and almost a duty of continually patrolling the horrible old vacant London mansion." Thus Jimmie's mind becomes as much a part of the haunted house as his rococo bedroom or that gulf of a staircase out of which came up Soames Junior; the bird-faced scullery-maid, and that which had "managed to hoof and scrabble its way up . . . a blurred, whitish, beast-like shape with still, passive, almost stagnant eyes in its immense, fixed face."

The story is a very skilful psychological study of a haunted mind, as the story of Miss Duveen is really a piece of delicate insight into the mind of an old lady "not quite right in the head." Miss Duveen's visions reach the reader *via* the memory of the narrator, who was her boy-confidant. She tells him what he "may be astonished to hear" which she "learned only yesterday, and that is how exceedingly *sad* life is."

"And yet you know they say very little about it. . . . They don't *mention* it. Every moment, every hour, every day, every year—one, two, three, four, five, seven, ten," she paused, frowned, "and so on. Sadder and sadder. Why? Why? It's strange, but oh, so true. You really can have no notion, child,



how very sad I am myself at times. In the evening, when they all gather together, in their white raiment, up and up and up, I sit on the garden-seat, on Miss Coppin's garden-seat, and precisely in the middle (you'll be kind enough to remember that ?) and my *thoughts* make me sad.' She narrowed her eyes and shoulders. 'Yes, and frightened, my child. Why must I be so guarded? One angel—the greatest fool could see the wisdom of that. But billions!—with their fixed eyes shining, so very boldly, on me.' ”

#### “THE TURN OF THE SCREW”

It is in the world of those unfortunates who can no longer control the fertile phantasy of the mind that Miss Duveen and Jimmie and also Anthony Vaine exist. In Jimmie's case it is not possible to avoid a comparison of the story with Henry James's *Turn of the Screw*; but when the comparison is made, the likeness is found only in tricks of language. The apparitions beheld by Jimmie are created in his febrile imagination; the governess of Miles and Flora in *The Turn of the Screw* fights the positive evil influence of Peter Quint and Miss Jessell; she sees the ghostly shapes of Quint and the ex-governess by reason of her own influence over the

children she is fighting to save. James's purpose is to convince the reader of the actual presence of two evil personalities who have died in the flesh but retain the power of materialising and communing with Miles and Flora. The governess who relates the dreadful story, tells how she first discovered the ghostly hunt actually in progress. She was playing with the children in the big garden. "As we had lately begun geography, the lake was the Sea of Azof."

"Suddenly, amid these elements, I became aware that on the other side of the Sea of Azof we had an interested spectator. The way this knowledge gathered in me was the strangest thing in the world—the strangest, that is, except the very much stranger in which it quickly merged itself. I had sat down with a piece of work—for I was something or other that could sit—on the old stone bench which overlooked the pond, and in this position I began to take in with certitude and yet without direct vision the presence, a good way off, of a third person. The old trees, the thick shrubbery, made a great and pleasant shade, but it was all suffused with the brightness of the hot, still hour. There was no ambiguity in anything; none whatever at least in the conviction I from one moment to another found myself forming as to what I should see straight

before me and across the lake as a consequence of raising my eyes. They were attached at this juncture to the stitching in which I was engaged, and I can feel once more the spasm of my effort not to move them till I should so have steadied myself as to be able to make up my mind what to do."

It is a deliberate building-up of the reader's conviction ; yet the apparition of Quint's " white face of damnation " is to be seared sharply enough upon the mind before the author lets us go. The psychological refinement, the selection of what is and is not told, has much more of Henry James's personality about it than the nightmare visions of Jimmie have of De la Mare. It was a rash thing for the latter writer to echo anything in Henry James's style of novel-writing while making a ghost story so much briefer and less dramatic than *The Turn of the Screw*, but artistically he emerges from the ordeal with éclat. The language of *The Turn of the Screw* is the least inverted, and the story the most straightforward that James ever wrote. *Out of the Deep* seems to have been composed under the potent, invidious influence of James's style in the long and involved stories like *The Golden Bowl* and *Princess Cassamasima*. His music and the

potency of his carefully chosen words are of course peculiarly his own and do not resemble James's. But possibly because he is telling the story backwards in the retrospective manner, one is continually reminded of James by superficial resemblances.

“For a while Jimmie had let well alone. Indeed, if it had been a mere matter of choice, he would far rather have engaged in a friendly and jocular conversation of this description with his old charwoman. . . .”

It is not James's, but the “had let,” the “if it had been a mere matter of choice”—such temporising and qualifying tenses and phrases—belong to a particular mode of introspective story-telling which Henry James may be said to have made his own. These reminders occur again and again in the story :

“ ‘ And suppose, my dear, ’ Jimmie had almost as brilliantly as ever smiled. . . . ”

“ Yet facts are facts—even comforting ones. And unless his memory was utterly untrustworthy, he had somehow—somehow contrived to regain his physical balance. Candelabrum in hand, he had actually, indeed, at last emerged from the room, and stooped his dark head over

the balusters in search of what unaccountably had *not* awaited his nearer acquaintance."

It has the very movement as well as the syntax of James's retrospective narratives. At one point in the story the note of resemblance is beyond doubt—rather startlingly so.

"The effort, then, must have needed some little courage. It might almost have needed a tinge of inspiration. It was in no sense intended as a challenge. He would, in fact, rather remain alone than chance summoning—well, *any* (once animate) relic of the distant past. But obviously the most practical way of proving—if only to yourself—that you can be content with your own reconnaissances in the very dead of night, was to demonstrate to that self, that, even if you should ask for it, assistance would not be forthcoming. He had been as fantastic as that."

How many of James's characters "had been as" something or other "as that!"

But the story is on ground of the supernatural, or rather the macabre, where James would never have ventured. How unobtrusively, suddenly, Jimmie's ghosts come and go! The first apparition, Soames Junior—is there before he or we have time to shiver. The shiver



is left in the very atmosphere—in the suspense of expectancy: what came so easily, naturally before in answer to that “prolonged, pulsating, faint, distant tintinnabulation” will of course come again—if he yields to the mad temptation again to pull the bell-rope. But see how artfully the author is playing upon your mind! The opening passage of this story began the gradual process of making the house eerie. After ringing the bell Jimmie

“had fallen back on to his pillow with an absurd little quicket of laughter, like that of a naughty boy up to mischief. But instant sobriety followed. Poor sleepers should endeavour to compose themselves. Tampering with empty space, stirring up echoes in pitch-black pits of darkness is scarcely sedative. And then, as he lay striving with extraordinary fervour not to listen, but to concentrate his mind on the wardrobe, and to keep his eyes from the door, that door must gently have opened.”

What a model of deft explanation, psychological description, and mystery-mongering! And once the ghostly butler who has entered is fairly sized up by Jimmie, the author shows with a further explanatory description how his mental state resembles that of the consumptive Alice. While the butler

"stood there solitary in his black, in that terrific blaze of candle-light . . . for a sheer solid minute the occupant of the Arabian bed had really stopped thinking.

"When indeed you positively press your face, so to speak, against the crystalline window of your eyes, your mind is apt to become a perfect vacuum."

### THE DREAM AND THE GHOST

In a longer study of ghostly fiction an interesting line of investigation might be followed to show the relation between the dream described in the narrative, such as the dream apparition of Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* or some of the dreams described by the Midget in her *Memoirs*, and these waking hallucinations rising "out of the deep." Clearly they are psychologically similar; but when the perception or hallucination is told as something dreamed by a fictional character the reader is further removed from the ghostly atmosphere and feels more secure. The haunting Sabathier in *The Return* is surely somewhere between the ghost which fills the stage and the ghost in the related dream. He leads a separate existence concurrent with that of Arthur Lawford and the people who live around Lawford, but the course of his separate

career runs closer and closer into Lawford's own, until his haunting presence and partial possession of the living man is as disturbing and fearful as the apparition of the most unpleasantly inevitable of ghosts. Undoubtedly *The Return* richly deserved the "Polignac Prize," but it is much more like a *tour de force* than anything else De la Mare has written. The vague suggestion left to the reader at the end that the startling change in Lawford's appearance *may* have been due to imagination is rather unsatisfying after the persuasive explanations and speculations of his friend Herbert have drawn us deeper and deeper into sharing Lawford's conviction of being possessed, body and mind, by another man—a man whose tombstone declared that he had died in 1739. In the thick of the story how resist such arguments as those advanced by Herbert for the edification of the unfortunate Lawford?

"Stranger things even than this have happened. There are dozens here—in print. What are we human beings after all? Clay in the hands of the potter. Our bodies are merely an inheritance, packed tight and corded up. We have practically no control over their main functions. We can't even replace a little fingernail. And look at the faces of us—what atrocious

mockeries most of them are of any kind of image ! But we know our bodies change—age, sickness, thought, passion, fatality. It proves they are amazingly plastic. And merely even as a theory it is not in the least untenable that by force of some violent convulsive effort from outside one's body might change. . . . It answers with odd voluntariness to friend or foe, smile or snarl. As for what we call the laws of Nature, they are pure assumptions to-day, and may be nothing better than scrap-iron to-morrow. Good Heavens, Lawford, consider man's abysmal impudence."

Several of the short stories are not ridden by ghosts so much as by a ghostly atmosphere. It would seem that the true ghost story manipulates the reader's rational belief before or during or after the apparition of the ghost. The employment of powerfully affective language will serve to intensify the eeriness of the atmosphere, but the author falls back upon the ingenuity of invention and explanation to make his story plausible. De la Mare is chiefly remarkable in ghostly fiction for working both in this highly sophisticated intellectual manner and also in the comparatively unsophisticated production of "other-worldliness" by the sheer power of poetry. "The Creatures," for example, is an eerie tale of a

mysteriously situated Eden on the edge of cliffs in which the two strange children or "Creatures" live, and the framework of a story is carefully laid first to lure the reader into the mesh of mystery formed by words which produce a state of mind indistinguishable from that of dream, the mood that is induced by a "magic" poem. The narrator's fellow-traveller tells him of the strange experience which had befallen him many years before, when he was tramping over

"a country of stones and emerald meadows, of green, meandering, aimless lanes, of farms set in their cliffs and valley like rough time-bedimmed jewels. . . .

"You stand, you sit, or lie prone on its bud-starred heights, and look down; the green, dispersed, treeless landscape spreads beneath you, with its hollows and mounded slopes, clustering farmstead, and scatter of village, all motionless under the vast wash of sun and blue, like the drop-scene of some enchanted playhouse centuries old. So, too, the visionary bird-haunted headlands, veiled faintly in a mist of unreality above their broken stones and the enormous saucer of the sea.

"You cannot guess there what you may not chance upon, or whom. Bells clash, boom, and quarrel hollowly on the edge of darkness in



those breakers. Voices waver across the fainter winds."

And what an Eden was that the traveller at last found himself in with the Creatures. "It cried 'Hospital' to the wanderers of the universe."

"A full mile long, between undiscerned walls, it sloped and narrowed towards a sea at whose dark unfoamed blue, even at this distance, my eyes dazzled. Yet how can one call that a garden which reveals no ghost of a sign of human arrangement? . . ."

The author here returns to the rôle of the dream poet. He makes the narrator in the story say, in recalling his emotion at hearing the "haunting, penetrating, pining" voices of the Creatures talking to their father :

"A kind of mournful gaiety, a lamentable felicity, such as rings in the cadences of an old folk-song, welled into my heart. I was come back to the borders of Eden, bowed and outwearied, gazing from out of dream into dream, homesick, 'forsaken.' "

The eeriness of the story is without dread. We are in the atmosphere of "The Listeners"

and "Arabia" and "The Dark Château," or, to mention other stories by the poet, "The Riddle," "The Bird of Travel," "Lispert, Lispett and Vaine," and, above all, "The Vats."

### "CROSSINGS"

In the fairy play *Crossings* is also found a dream ghostliness, but the ghost of the children's kind aunt is a beautiful spirit pervading that wonderful country cottage. Something of Algernon Blackwood's mystical sporting with solid facts is mingled there with the loveliness of dream poetry. How far removed is this kind of ghostliness from the stark horrors of a writer like Strindberg! In such stories as Strindberg's *In Mid-Summer Days* the loveliest setting is filled with the horrid apparitions of a devil-possessed mind, an imagination swarming with the savageries of Europe's darkest superstitions. But there is in even a slight phantasy play of De la Mare's a poetic validity of perception lacking in Strindberg. Near the beginning of *Crossings*, in his stage directions, which admirably serve to set up a stage in the reader's mind in compensation for the planks, the author says things which tell of wonderful coming events. For instance, at Aunt Agatha's in Bayswater

the children are shown sitting in the forbidding drawing-room, and we are told of little Ann who "peeps out of her body as if out of a cupboard." The dark Sallie "speaks in a low, clear voice, as if out of her thoughts." The vivid touches of "real" life, the dialogue, for instance, with the departing housekeeper, Mrs. Marshall, all serve a purpose in the author's delicate manipulation of his material, and we are ready with the children to be enchanted in very truth when they arrive at "Crossings," of which Frances exclaims to the others :

"The sweetest, cosiest, loneliest rooms. And the kitchen! Tombstone floor, *enormous* copper pots and pans, Jack-and-the-Beanstalk crockery; bootjacks, warming-pans, hams, and cheeses; jams, jellies, and jorams; bins, bottles, and blunderbi. And there, Sallie, peeping and whiskering at us from where the cuckoo comes out of the clock—a Mouse, my dear. It can't—it can't be real. (She blows her nose.) Excuse me, elder sister, Sallina Lunn; it makes me cry."

Of course it is *not* real: such a perfect cottage as "Crossings" is, to use an idiom, "a dream of a cottage." Yet callous must be either reader or spectator of this little play not to be at one with the children during that blissful holiday

in the country ; haunted, too, by the apparition of a loving face. That the reader can derive so much experience from a mere perusal of the play is testimony to the author's poetic power, and this is evident without quoting the astonishing revival of the madrigal at its very finest—the lullaby sung in *Crossings* by Sallie. This is not the place to quote it full length, and it would be a shame to offer but an extract to any reader who has not yet made acquaintance with *Crossings*.

The last word, then, is with the poet rather than the inventive story-teller, and so in *The Veil and Other Poems*, besides the haunted personal mood of "Who's That?" there is the vivid imaginative sympathy with "The Suicide" and with the "Drugged." In the latter poem the drugged man is seen

" Inert in his chair,  
In a candle's guttering glow ;  
His bottle empty,  
His fire sunk low. . . ."

He is among nightmares which in a menacing throng gibe and squeal, their faces "cadaverous grey."

" While on high from an attic stare  
Horrors, in beauty apparelled,  
Down the dark air.  
A stream gurgles over its stones,

The chambers within are a-fire.  
Stumble his shadowy feet  
Through shine, through mire ;  
And the flames leap higher.  
In vain yelps the wainscot mouse ;  
In vain beats the hour ;  
Vacant his body must drowse  
Until daybreak flower."

Here ghosts, ghostly atmosphere, and objects of phantasy all are born in the drugged man's nightmare world of sleep. But the poem is like a horizontal cross-section of a dwelling-house which suddenly changes under the eye to a vertical cross-section. We see the drugged man sitting in that strangely quiet room. Then the scene changes before our gaze ; we look through a steep cleft into the phantasmal regions of his unmoored and rudderless mind. Finally, the poem reveals the room in a forecast of the rosy dawn lighting up the cold "flesh house" to which the wanderer must return.

"Lone soul—in horror to see,  
Than dream more meagre and awful,  
Reality."

Which is nightmare telescoped into dream. Something similar happens in "The Wanderers," which, however, tells not of nightmare but the invasion of a human mind (as if it "were not wholly a dark and dismal spot")



by two beautiful spirits, whose silence breathed of love.

However, it becomes necessary to ask in what consists the language of poetry, and how does poetry differ from what is not poetry ?

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY

Words Transformed—Primitive Singing—Sound for Sound's Sake—The Physical Basis of Verbal Music—Poetic Diction.

THE magical transformation of language which is called poetry has produced a vast amount of comment but very little scientific explanation. There have not been wanting arguments against the critical dissection of poetry, and yet the importance of understanding why similar words have entirely different values according as they are used prosaically or poetically should not need to be stressed. Perhaps even an elementary examination of the question will prove useful.

Broadly speaking, there are two modes of employing language. "Prosaic" is an unfortunate term for the one because words in prose may be more poetic than words in metre. It will perhaps be safer to say "matter-of-fact" when we mean prosaic, or at least to understand

“matter-of-fact” whenever using “prosaic.” In their valuable work, *The Meaning of Meaning*, Messrs. Ogden and Richards use “symbolic” for the dictionary value of a word, but this is liable to be misinterpreted in a discussion of the nature of poetry. I owe to their book, however, an explanation of a crucial difficulty in criticism. Although no one seems to have realised fully this fact before, if language is liable to a sudden transition from logical into poetic sense scientists, philosophers, and critics are bound to say what they mean in words constantly liable to wrong interpretation.

Thus many of the best things which have been said of poetry, like the dictum attributed to Longinus, “Beautiful words are the very and peculiar light of the mind,” can only be understood when some other than their lexical sense is attached to them.

“What is certain is that there is a common and important use of words which is different from the scientific or, as we shall call it, the strict *symbolic* use of words,” say Messrs. Ogden and Richards, who therefore make the broad distinction between the symbolic use of words for making a statement, and the emotive use of them to evoke certain attitudes or associations.

“ Emotional effects are naturally disregarded in the scientific use of language, it is evident that by including them language may be made to serve a double function. If we wish, for instance, to describe how, when we are impatient, a clock seems to go slowly, we may either describe psychologically the peculiarities in the expansions of our sense of duration, using symbols, or we may use symbols for a selection of these elements only, and so dispose them that they reinstate in the listener the appropriate emotions. We find in practice that these two methods of using language conflict in most cases, though not in all ; Professor Mackenzie has urged that when Shelley wrote

“ Hail to thee blithe spirit,  
Bird thou never wert,”

he did not really mean to deny that the lark belongs to the class Aves ; and conversely a statement adequate symbolically may have little emotional effect. Exceptions occur, but this conflict is so general that the usual antitheses between analysis and intuition, between science and art, between prose and poetry, are justified. . . . The complexities and ambiguities in the use of language for purposes of evocation are admittedly not less than those from which scientific language suffers. But when two people differ in what they are in ordinary usage perfectly correct in calling ‘ their interpretation ’

of a poem or a picture, the procedure to be adopted is quite other than that advisable should they differ in their interpretations of a physicist's remarks."

The authors go on to characterise the two uses of language, pointing out that "in symbolic speech the essential considerations are the correctness of the symbolisation and the truth of the references. In evocative speech the essential consideration is the character of the attitude aroused. Symbolic or matter-of-fact statements may indeed be used as a means of evoking attitudes, but when this use is occurring it will be noticed that the truth or falsity of the statements is of no consequence, provided that they are accepted by the hearer."

Two qualifications of the learned authors' summing up may be ventured upon. It is the peculiar triumph of the best poets to leave behind them "the complexities and ambiguities of language for purposes of evocation" so that the hearer or reader can no more fail to experience the poem, granted the innate sensibility, than a man with eyes can fail to experience sunshine bursting through foliage. The inevitable rightness of words when employed magically, is the hall-mark of the best poetry of dream. The other qualification is that if



"the truth or falsity of the statements is of no consequence," that is to say, is accepted involuntarily, the language is evocative and only incidentally scientific. Poetry, of course, can express scientific truth as well as beauty, and it may be a characteristic of the greatest poetry to be scientifically true, while it is evoking beauty, so long as the poet was not thinking scientifically at the moment of composition. Look at the perfectly appropriate psychology, botany, sociology, and physics in Shakespeare's work! Certainly a writer so widely recognised as phantastic as is De la Mare, has embodied in his work much remarkably accurate truth, in the scientific sense.

Indeed it might be claimed that the only sense in which poetry is unscientific in its statements or implications is that the poet does not wait for the logical chain of evidence to be completed. Hence this is why critical enjoyment may be the safest test of poetry, enjoyment renewed by generation after generation of men; and the one small crumb of justification for existence which superfluous critics may gather is the possibility that their comments may help to make such enjoyment and understanding more widespread.

## PRIMITIVE SINGING

The double use which we make of words, to convey information and to express emotions and ideas beyond the reach of scientific statement is reflected in the very origins of language. It seems to be well established now that language, although the daughter of necessity, can claim art as father, for it served to express and communicate emotional experience as well as the more strictly practical needs of our primitive ancestors. The grunts and short shouts which were sufficient when reinforced by gesture to name and indicate objects, distances, and direction were elaborated in sound when the savage felt unusually elated, perhaps after a successful hunt, or because the lady he had just clubbed filled his heart with uncontainable emotion.

“The first things that were expressed in song were, to be sure, neither deep nor wise; how could you expect it? Note the frequency with which we are told that the songs of savages consist of or contain totally meaningless syllables. Thus we read about American Indians that ‘The native word which is translated *song* does not suggest any use of words. To the Indian, the music is of primal importance, words may or may not accompany the music. When

words are used in song, they are rarely employed as a narrative, the sentences are not apt to be complete' (Louise Pound, *Mod. Lang. Ass.*, 32, 224); and similarly: 'Even where the slightest vestiges of epic poetry are missing, lyric poetry of one form or another is always present. It may consist of the musical use of meaningless syllables that sustain the song; or it may consist largely of such syllables with a few interspersed words suggesting certain ideas and certain feelings; or it may rise to the expression of emotions connected with warlike deeds, with religious feeling, love, or even to the praise of the beauties of nature' (Boas, *Internat. Journ. Amer. Ling.*)."<sup>1</sup>

This principle of sound for sound's sake is a vital element in the poetry of De la Mare, who is a master of "the musical use of meaningless syllables" and "of such syllables, with a few interspersed words." Very often his poetry, especially his earlier work, is like a performance on a musical instrument, so that actual words tend to lose their customary meaning in subservience to the chant. In "Maerchen," which is in the late volume of *The Veil*,

"The cat looked long and softly at the King,"

is the musical *motif* of the poem. This refrain is

<sup>1</sup> Otto Jespersen, *Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin*.

played up to and led down to by the remaining lines of the three stanzas.

Miss Pamela Bianco's fairy-like drawing will not explain the homeless music of "Mirage," which opens :

"Strange fabled face! From sterile shore to shore,  
O'er plunging seas, thick-sprent with glistening brine,  
The voyagers of the world with sail and heavy oar  
Have sought thy shrine.  
Beauty inexorable hath lured them on :  
Remote unnamèd stars enclustering gleam—  
Burn in thy flowered locks, though creeping daybreak wan  
Prove thee but dream."

But many of his most beautiful poems are "remote, unnamèd," and enclusted stars, born in midnight air, living their delicious moment in bodiless song.

A more remarkable example of the quality of primitive song is to be found in *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*. Nod, Thimble, and Thumb have a wonderful language of their own. At one point in the story it rises into pure song. Before they leave their forest to set out upon the long journey to Tishnar,

"the Forest-mulgars sat in a great ring, and ate and drank, and then when the sun had ascended into the middle of the sky and the snow-piled branches shone white as Tishnar's lambs, Thumb, Thimble, and Nod rose up and

sang, 'Gar Mulgar Dusangee,' the Mulgars' Farewell. While they sang, all the Forest-mulgars, in their companies and tribes, sat solemnly around them, furred and coloured and pouched and tailed. Shave their chops and put them in breeches, they might well be little men. And they waved slowly palm-branches and greenery to the time of the tune ; some even moaned and grunted, too.

" Far away in Nanga-noon  
Lived an old and grey Baboon,<sup>1</sup>  
Ah-mi, Sulâni !  
Once a Prince among his kind,  
Now forsaken, left behind,  
Feeble, lonely, all but blind :  
Sulâni, ghar magleer.

Peaceful Tishnar came by night,  
In the moonbeams cold and white ;  
Ah-mi, Sulâni !  
' Far away from Nanga-noon,  
Thou old and grey Baboon,  
Is a journey for thee soon !'  
Sulâni, ghar magleer.

' Be not frightened, shut thine eye ;  
Comfort take, nor weep, nor sigh ;  
Solitary Tishnar's nigh !'  
Sulâni, ghar magleer.

Old Baboon, he gravely did  
All that peaceful Tishnar bid ;  
Ah-mi, Sulâni !

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<sup>1</sup> " So I have translated ' Babbabooma,' " says the author in a footnote.



In the darkness cold and grim  
 Drew his blanket over him ;  
 Closed his old eyes, sad and dim :  
 Sulâni, ghar magleer.

“ And here the Mulgars all lay flat, with their faces in the snow, and put the palms of their hands on their heads ; while the three Mulla-Mulgars paced slowly round, singing the last verse, which, after the doggerel I have made of the others, I despair of putting into English :

Talaheeti sul magloon  
 Olgar, ulgar, Nanga-noon ;  
 Ah-mi, Sulâni !  
 Tishnar sōōtli maltmahee,  
 Ganganareez soongalee,  
 Manni Mulgar sang suwhee :  
 Sulâni, ghar magleer.”

Is it no more than coincidence that in this fine translation into English lyric of primitive song, the rhythmic effect of Sir Edwin Arnold's poem, “ He who died at Anzan,” probably a translation from an Arabic chant, is reproduced, and as we should expect from the greater artist, beautifully enhanced ? Here is the beginning of Arnold's poem :

“ He who died at Anzan sends  
 This to comfort all his friends :

‘ Faithful friends ! It lies, I know,  
 Pale and white and cold as snow ;  
 And ye say, “ Abdullah's dead ! ”  
 Weeping at the feet and head.’ ”

Although the “ Gar Mulgar Dusangee ” proved irresistible for quotation here, a couple of pages before it in *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* is “ The Forest-Mulgars’ Dancing-Song,” which perhaps even more adequately illustrates the primitive song. Possibly the more cultivated accents and form of the Mulla-Mulgars’ Farewell is due to their royal race of *mulla* mulgars. This dancing-song belonged to the common or *forest* mulgars !

“ Bhoor juggub duppa singlee—duppa singlee—duppa singlee ;

Bhoor juggub duppa singlee ;

Sal rosen ghar Bhōōsh ! ”

which is quite beyond critical commentaries !

### SOUND FOR SOUND’S SAKE

The sound for sound’s sake principle, developing from primitive song into modern lyric *via* the ballad and folk-song, has moulded language and determined the present formation of a host of words. Sound-imitation, as in *splash*, *plop*, *tinkle*, although a common and indispensable explanation, is by no means a comprehensive one, and leaves out of account most of the emotional use of mere sound in language. This lyric faculty, so prominent in language, has brought numerous words into existence, has lengthened some and has rejected others. For certain pur-

poses, not strictly logical, *aggravate* is more effective than *vex*, *rapsallion* than *rogue*, *cantankerous* than *irritable*, *infinitesimal* than *little*. The vocalisation of the longer words is itself a source of pleasure in the mood fitting to their employment. The long process of the growth of language is reflected in miniature when children invent words to serve the emotional need of the passing moment; and when poets adapt old words to new uses or, more rarely, coin a new one with success, a similar act of creation takes place. Certainly here again De la Mare reveals himself as an artist of quite extraordinary skill. In using words to express child-like moods he is supreme in English poetry. In the whole sphere of the evocative use of words of course the author of "daffodils that take the winds of March with beauty" remains supreme. No other poet has to his credit so many imperishable creations of sound and sense, born of the momentary embrace of passion and thought. But De la Mare's work is a rich field for the student of word-evolution. So constant is his faculty, not perhaps of lending a new shade of significance to the lexical meaning of words, although he does this also, but of using words for their atmosphere and for the music that is in them, that this might almost be regarded as the main characteristic of

his style. A scrupulous selection of the phrase is evident in his prose as well as his verse. He does not always succeed in his eager search for the inevitable word, and sometimes he will indulge in a capricious avoidance of a wholesome, honest term in order to give us an unnecessary archaism like *eftsoones*, or an unfortunate coinage like *wonderly*. Far more frequently, however, especially in *Songs of Childhood* and *Peacock Pie*, his archaisms and experiments are carried off with a happy verve which is irresistible, while in his "grown-up" poetry and prose one constantly finds a beautiful but neglected word like "scrutiny" flourishing anew in his hands, so that he is probably the best living maker of the English language. His diction will be considered in more detail later.

In connection with the subject of sound in language it is most interesting to find the poet opening his lecture on "Poetic Technique" with an attempt to explain in what he describes as a rudimentary fashion how and why words delight us. He finds that the answer is primarily by the mere sound of their syllabling in the ear and by the formation of that sound with the lips, tongue, throat, and so on. He says that "to Landor the very sound 'Rose Aylmer' was a blossom of which the accompanying words

were the leaves." If this is true of Landor, the less poet he, and I think that the smallness of the quantity of Mr. de la Mare's work which has been affected by so vicious a method of composition proves the exquisite balance in him of craft and inspiration. But perhaps Landor is innocent, and all we need deduce is Mr. de la Mare's obvious delight in vocal sounds. In his most perfect music there is no suggestion of any fine words being set off by others like a blossom by its leaves. The blossom is the final beauty of the accomplished poem. There is not even a touch of quaintness in any words of a poem like "Music," which occurs in the volume of *Motley*; yet how marvellous is the result :

"When music sounds, gone is the earth I know,  
And all her lovely things even lovelier grow ;  
Her flowers in vision flame, her forest trees  
Lift burdened branches, stilled with ecstasies.

When music sounds, out of the water rise  
Naiads whose beauty dims my waking eyes,  
Rapt in strange dream burns each enchanted face,  
With solemn echoing stirs their dwelling-place.

When music sounds, all that I was I am  
Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came ;  
While from Time's woods break into distant song  
The swift-winged hours, as I hasten along."



Does it not leave in the soul the tremulous pleasure and the divine discontent of music fading into silence? No single word, but the wonderful sequences of sounds set up by the whole poem, added to the perfect movement of the rhythm produces the magical effect. All the resources of poetry are called forth. The syllables of the lines are musical phrases with notes delightfully varied. The first line, for example, has no less than nine distinct vowel notes. The mind has no sooner perceived this than the poet is preparing a new pleasure, that of assonance, and the vowels of *lovely* and *lovelier* are clashing their echoes together across the thin notes of *things even*; and then comes the first sonorous rhyme. The next two lines repeat the effect of thin, high notes between full sounds; they also begin to echo earlier sounds. *Forest* echoes *gone*; *burdened* echoes *earth*. The reader proceeds to the second stanza with the trumpeting sound of *flame* still unanswered, until the crying second line brings *waking* to tremble up into the memory after *flame*; while the repetition of the assonantal effect in one line, *Naiads, my, eyes*, both recalls the effect of *lovely-lovelier*, and carries it further, for *eyes* is also a rhyme. The poet's mastery of his instrument is now shown to be complete. This effect, a kind of culminating

*bravura*, is exactly halfway through the poem. It has followed the clash of *sounds*—*out* in the preceding line, as well as echoed the effect of the opening of the poem. The next two lines,

“ Rapt in strange dream burns each enchanted face,  
With solemn echoing stirs their dwelling-place,”

return to the melody of changing notes, except for the delicate consonance of *their-dwelling*. The consonants but enhance the vowel-music, either by sharply defining it, or by the additional repetition effect in alliteration, and this alliteration will be found as pervasive and varied in the poem as the vowel-melody. When the last stanza has been read the imaginative movement of the ideas will end on the summary of the musical *motif*, the quick high notes of *swift-winged*, one more *a* sound in *hasten*, and the note of *hours*, which, coming into the word *sounds* has been like an undercurrent or accompaniment to the music. Much might be said of the delicate perceptions or ideas so exquisitely expressed, but this would not further the inquiry into verbal music. It may be noted, however, that such a poem is the consequence of the skilful use of verse not less than of well-chosen words. There are ninety-five words in the poem, most of them monosyllables, with 121 vowel-sounds and a total of 236 con-

sonants pronounced, including aspirates and *w*. It seemed worth while counting, because in his lecture on "Poetic Technique" Mr. de la Mare says that a hundred letters of fine verse will probably contain a smaller proportion of consonants, and certainly of consonants in clot, than a hundred letters even of respectable prose. He cites a *Times* leader and Campion's "Cherry Ripe" as bases for the comparison. Not having a copy of the daily *Times* at hand I took up a copy of the *Times Literary Supplement*, and instead of a hundred letters marked off the first ninety-five words of the leading essay, which was on "Coventry Patmore." The first ninety-five words of "Cherry Ripe" end with the word *frowns* in the third line of the third stanza. There were 118 vowel sounds and 228 pronounced consonantal sounds in "Cherry Ripe," so that both De la Mare and Campion, in the poems selected, show a proportion of just a little less than fifty vowel sounds to one hundred consonantal sounds. A reader who has never carried out such an experiment, and who shares the common belief that the language of lyrical poetry is musical very largely because of its relatively high proportion of vowel-sounds, will realise my surprise at the discovery that the Coventry Patmore essay, when the first ninety-five words were analysed, showed a

proportion of nearly seventy vowel-sounds to one hundred pronounced consonants. With heated brain I seized another copy of the *Times Literary Supplement* and counted off the first one hundred words (one hundred being a simpler standard figure than ninety-five) in an essay on Herman Melville. I found a proportion of sixty-six vowels pronounced to one hundred consonants pronounced. In a later section of this chapter will be found analyses of a verse passage from Pope and a prose passage from Shakespeare. Pope has a proportion of vowels to consonants higher than either De la Mare or Campion, but lower than the prose essays referred to. Shakespeare's prose has more vowel-sounds than Pope's verse but less than the essays.

The inevitable conclusion is that consonants in English have been unjustly aspersed. Another popular notion must also be challenged. This has been well expressed by Mr. Gerald Gould,<sup>1</sup> in a reference to J. A. Symond's well-known essay.

“ ‘What strikes us in the whole of this great mass of lyric poetry,’ writes J. A. Symonds of the Elizabethan song-books, ‘is its perfect adaptation to music.’ ‘We discover,’ he says further, ‘but little of this quality in the lyrics

<sup>1</sup> *The Nature of Lyric.*



of the Victorian age ' ; and he records that when he had read two poems of Shelley, the ' Song of Pan ' and ' Swiftly walk o'er the Western Wave,' to an eminent singer, she ' pointed out how the verbal melody seemed intended to be self-sufficing in these lyrics, how full of complicated thoughts and changeful images the verse is, how packed with consonants the words are. . . .' Here, as always in art, the external change is but the other side of the internal ; the crowding of consonants is not an unlucky accident, but the expression of a mood."

The bald fact is that " these lyrics " which are " packed with consonants " show a proportion of fifty-five pronounced vowels to one hundred pronounced consonants, a proportion higher than Campion's or De la Mare's, though much lower than that of ordinary straightforward prose. It looks as if the elusive poetic quality termed *intensity* in language can be demonstrated by the prevailing proportion of vowels to consonantal sounds. This should, of course, be lower in poetic language than in prosaic language. After testing passages of the careful prose in *The Memoirs of a Midget* and in his short stories, I found that the proportion of vowel-sounds to consonants wavered between 58 : 100 and 62 : 100, which clearly



supports such a theory. For example, in the passage quoted on page 122 of this book, from "The Vats" (commencing with "Yet within the lightless bellies of these sarcophagi"), the proportion is approximately fifty-nine sounded vowels to one hundred sounded consonants—which is much more consonantal and—according to this theory—more poetic, than the passages in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

#### THE PHYSICAL BASIS OF VERBAL MUSIC

The whole subject of what may be called the psychology of phonetics is one urgently in need of investigation, not less by the psychoanalyst than the literary critic. The critic will never be able to understand what he means by "magical poetry" until some definite conclusions can be established about the psychological effect of vocalising certain sounds. Psychoanalysis has been much abused both by its apologists and its opponents, but no open-minded person will be willing to reject the hope of help from the psychologist in dealing with difficult problems like that of verbal inspiration. Conversely, the study of the foundations of language is bound to have a direct bearing on the work of the psychotherapist, who at present is restricted almost completely to the image-contents of a

patient's mind when using the famous word-association test for discovering neurotic complexes. The matter is worthy of a passing reference here, because poetry, which includes subtlety of meaning in simple perfection of form, and such is the best of De la Mare's, cannot be understood by the conscious intellect without assistance from the psychoanalyst.

By a common evolutionary process of specialisation music and language grew separated as they developed. The essence of poetry may perhaps be found in the fact that language has retained its musical or emotional elements during the process of shouldering an ever-increasing intellectual load. Many authorities believe that written language was originally pictorial everywhere, and if the importance of its image-conveying faculty is considered, such a view seems more than feasible. The potency of colour, contours, and masses in expressing or evoking emotion is probably equal to that of music, and what we find in poetry could have been anticipated from our knowledge of dreams: it satisfies the mind most completely when the colour, contour, shape, of imagery is conveyed with the music. The art of the painter like that of the musician is a specialised development of a fundamental principle in human think-

ing. The music existed in the noisy unintellectual syllabling of the savage, the painting in his cave-pictures. Thanks to the psychologist (however we may disapprove of many conclusions attributed to psychoanalysis), a great deal is known about the evocative and pleasing quality of images. In language the image-forming tendency has produced that wonderful efflorescence of figurative speech which is so indispensable a means of expression for the creative imagination. We know that the most effective combination of imagery and music is the mark of the finest poetry. The greatest poetry seems to convey food for the intellect together with the music of "Kubla Khan," the perfect form of the "Ode to Autumn," and the swift perception of "Epipsychidion." Then we get Hamlet's graveyard soliloquy, or Prospero's godlike musing. Much of De la Mare's poetry is associated with that of Coleridge and Poe by its refinement into almost bodiless song, but in collections like *The Listeners*, *Motley*, and *The Veil* are many examples of imagery happily wedded to music in the perfect expression of thought.

The lack of scientific knowledge is felt most sharply whenever an attempt is made to get at the basis of verbal music. A little useful

work has been done casually and incidentally in examining the physical basis of language, and in this place a hint may be taken from Bacon, who summarised other inquiries, and Guest, whose *History of English Rhythms* has not been followed up as it ought to have been. It is all very well to say that the most beautiful language is poetry, and that poetry means creation. But if poetry is creative language, it must in some way embody or reflect the physical action of speech in order to have a direct connection with human experience. The obvious place to search for its secret is in the actual formation of the sounds which constitute language. Many philosophers have made useful empirical observations. Onomatopœia or sound-imitation has already been referred to. Bacon wrote: "Trembling of water has resemblance with the letter 'l'; quenching of hot metals with the letter 'z'; snarling of dogs with the letter 'r'; the noise of screech-owls with the letter 'sh'; voice of cats with the diphthong 'eu'; voice of cuckoos with the diphthong 'ou'; sounds of strings with the diphthong 'ng.'" Guest went a step further and tried to explain the physiological reason for the significance of certain letters. He suggested that just as the note of a common organ-reed may take the



qualities of all the vowel-sounds in succession merely by altering the length of the tube which confines the vibrations, so the peculiar characteristics of vowels are due to the length of the cavity in the mouth. And the consonants are differentiated by the muscular effort of pronouncing them. To take what he calls "the two trembling letters 'l' and 'r' as illustrations :

"When we pronounce 'l' the breath in escaping under the side-teeth presses against the yielding tongue, which may be considered as fixed at its root and tip." Thus the edges of the tongue vibrate and no doubt awaken in the mind an unconscious association with the concept of trembling. Guest distinguishes "r" from "l" as possessing a narrower sound, "not unlike 'e,' while that of 'l' is decidedly a broad one." And the vibrations, instead of being slow and uncertain like those of "l," are "quick and decided."

One cannot well dissent. But the explanation is seen to be incomplete in the two excellent examples he gives. He finds in these "the roll of a liquid mass beautifully contrasted with the harsh rattle of rock or shingle" :

"As burning Ætna from his boiling stew  
Doth belch out flames, and rocks in pieces broke,  
And ragged ribs of mountains molten new,  
Enwraught in cole-black cloud."



And :

“ As raging seas are wont to roar,  
When wintry storm his wrathful wreck does threat,  
The rolling billows beat the rugged shore.”

All that may be ventured on here is to affirm the existence of a physiological basis for the music of poetry, just as so-called material phenomena provide the imagery of dreams. The peculiar arrangement of consonants and vowels producing poetry will remain, although possibly to a reduced degree, the prerogative of the poet's dreaming mind. Poetry is produced in intellectual excitement. Vibrating with an emotion, the mind becomes incandescent and ideas, images, and verbal sounds are fused and cast into articulation by a process which can never be wholly deliberate and conscious.

The peculiar value of vowel sounds and consonants will be examined more closely in the subsequent criticism of De la Mare's style. One important conclusion may be carried away from this inquiry. There seems to be no justification for the assumption that in some way consonants are especially connected with the intellectual content of poetry and vowels with elemental emotion of the song. The two play equally important parts, and good prose will be found on the whole to be less consonantal than good verse.

## POETIC DICTION

We are still on thin ice if we ask whether the diction of poetry is different from the diction of matter-of-fact statement. Criticism is loath to acknowledge that there is such a thing as poetic diction which is neither conventional artificiality nor decadent preciousness. Wordsworth's influence has undoubtedly been salutary ; his plea for naturalness and sincerity still sounds a useful warning. But there is a tendency to forget that Coleridge, a greater critic than Wordsworth, replied to the famous *Lyrical Ballads* preface, and showed that poetic diction was a very different thing from ordinary speech. He was able to quote Wordsworth's best poetry in support of his argument. Many modern poets are inclined to adopt prosaic language when they are after a poetic result, and Mr. J. C. Squire provides an example in *American Poems and Others* when he writes of "The Stockyard," describing what he sees as if the bald facts are the meaning of the poem :

"The gallery led to a door, and we left the sky  
And stood among beams by a flat, revolving drum.  
Pigs slung by the hinder feet went round with that drum  
Squealing, and when they had soared and drooped again  
A man with a rhythmical knife let blood from throats,

And they passed down the shed on an endless chain,  
smoothly,  
At regular intervals, pig after pig after pig  
Hung downwards, slate-coloured, pouring blood, to vanish  
Through a door . . .  
And then, still steaming, moved evenly into a hall  
A line of pinkish-white pigs, atrociously naked."

It is much easier to recognise that this is not poetry than to explain the effect of the whole poem. I do not agree altogether with a sympathetic critic<sup>1</sup> of Mr. Squire who, admitting the imaginative force of the piece, says: "It gets rid of the old dead rhymes, the old dead metrical pauses and alliterations and assonances." This point of view is very popular to-day, but the proper response would seem to be a reference to some poem like that lovely thing "Music."<sup>2</sup> Probably the justification for much modern *vers libre* of the type of "The Stockyard" is that it attacks new material which cannot yet be thoroughly digested by the poetic imagination; it occurs midway in the process of passionate refinement by which the crude facts of life are absorbed into everlasting poetry. A poet like De la Mare starts with the dangerous advantage of material which has been more completely broken down into the elements of poetry. In his case there is every reason why we should be glad that the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. James Douglas.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 208.

Muse of English poetry has led him along the moss-covered ways of beauty.

The question of diction, however, is one of phrase. It would be easy to show that Mr. Squire has by no means discarded all the "tricks of the trade" in "The Stockyard." Rhythms do repeat, often with striking effect; repetitions and parallelisms are used constantly; assonance and alliteration are vital elements, as they must always be in expressive prose or expressive verse. Many of the words and phrases are recognisably prosaic, probably for the reason already suggested. But the only way of deciding whether the diction of poetry has some quality peculiar to itself independent of metre and rhythm is to examine concrete examples very closely. Granted that *poetry is inspired language producing on the mind effects which cannot be reproduced by any paraphrase deliberately composed*, the numerous definitions of poetry which have been supplied by various critics need not be considered here.

In his *Table Talk*, Coleridge said that poetry was "the best words in the best order," and just because the definition is at once so comprehensive and so inadequate, it will serve to suggest a pertinent question: "The best for what purpose?" On the whole, Mr. Squire's words in

“The Stockyard” are approximately the best words in the best order, because his purpose is impressionistic, like that of a reporter. Are Pope’s words the best and in the best order in this extract from his *Essay on Man*?

“Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,  
The proper study of mankind is Man.  
Plac’d on this isthmus of a middle state,  
A being darkly wise, and rudely great :  
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,  
With too much weakness for the stoic’s pride,  
He hangs between : in doubt to act, or rest ;  
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast ;  
In doubt his mind or body to prefer ;  
Born but to die, and reas’ning but to err ;  
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,  
Whether he thinks too little, or too much :  
Chaos of thought and passion, all confus’d ;  
Still by himself abus’d, or disabus’d ;  
Created half to rise, and half to fall ;  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all ;  
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl’d ;  
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world !”

Little fault could be found with the use made of the words. “Sceptic side” is bad. “With too much weakness” is obviously a forced piece of rhetoric to match “With too much knowledge.” There are no other serious flaws in the language, which is lucid, natural, occasionally forceful, and throughout economical. It has often been said that a characteristic of poetic ex-



pression is maximum economy of words : a genuine poem is not translatable into prose without using a greater number of words and omitting even then much of the original sense. Poetry, of course, cannot be reproduced in any other words, except by accident. Such a happy accident, although it might provide a single word of power, certainly could not provide the paraphrase of a poem without loss. Another poet might make a new poem resembling the original, but if it is really a poem it exists as a distinct and fresh unity, and was not the product of conscious purpose. It is as distinct in entity from the original as the music made by a composer to go with a good poem, even when the music is as pleasing as one setting of " Arabia."

Can the above passage from the *Essay on Man* be paraphrased without loss of sense or dilution of the language ?

Better know thyself than try to know God. Man is the proper study of mankind. Placed in this middle state between god and beast, endowed with crude nobility and wisdom which bewilders, he hovers between scepticism and stoical indifference, too wise for the one and too weak for the other. He is equally in doubt choosing action or inaction and deciding between his body

and his mind. He is born to die, and whether he think too little or too much, is equally ignorant ; for he reasons only to err. In the confusion of his thought and passion, abused or disabused by himself, he remains at the mercy of his environment, unable to enjoy his heritage of lordship over life. Destined half to rise and half to fall, the sole judge of Truth yet endlessly in error, he is the glory, the jest, and the riddle of the world.

This piece of prose might be improved so that it should be as good of its kind as Pope's verse, and then nothing but the metre of the original and a few forceful phrases or economical words which have been deliberately preserved in the paraphrase would be left to Pope. No slight is intended to Pope, and his many admirers may find ample justification for their admiration, even if the question " Is this poetry ? " is now answered with a negative. The extreme difficulty of deciding what is poetry when confronted with concrete examples is illustrated by this case, because we can truthfully declare that the *Essay on Man* has given us a pleasurable excitement at some time in life. " I can remember wild pleasure at the aphoristic and witty sayings scattered throughout the works of Pope and Young," says Vernon Lee.<sup>1</sup> " ' And wretches

<sup>1</sup> *The Handling of Words.*

hang that jurymen may dine ' seemed positively sublime." But she explains that the allusion is "to the extraordinary things which passed for poetry before the age when one begins to care for . . . well, for what one calls *poetry* in later years."

If that is how the philosophical Vernon Lee jumps the difficulty, there is justification for trying to get more definite opinions about the nature of poetic diction. For the secret of poetry lies somewhere between the sounds of language and the imagery and lexical meaning of words. Here is an extract from Hamlet's graveyard speech :

" I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises ; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory ; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man ! how noble in reason ! how infinite in faculty ! in apprehension how like a god ! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals ! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust ? Man

delights not me : no, nor woman either, though  
by your smiling you seem to say so."

This is poetry.

If now the principal words in these two extracts are set out in two parallel columns and examined, the reader will discover no striking general difference in the character of the isolated words. With the exceptions of Shakespeare's "goodly" and "express" they all might belong to either list. But if the lists are taken as two wholes, two vocabularies, Shakespeare is seen to have a decided advantage in range, in flexibility of utterance, and in ingenuity of arrangement. The more pleasing melody in Shakespeare's vocabulary is also evident. That the words in Pope's verse are prosaic has been already implied, and also that in Shakespeare's prose they are poetic. Even if metre and rhythm is left on one side, there remains a distinction in the employment of the words by Pope and by Shakespeare.

Some phrases taken from the two extracts will illustrate the transformation of common words which is the result of their poetic employment. Pope says "this isthmus of a middle state"; Shakespeare, "this goodly frame, the earth"; Pope, "Great lord of all things";

Shakespeare, "the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals"; Pope, "The glory, jest, and riddle of the world"; Shakespeare, "this quintessence of dust."

Pope's phrases belong to rational statements which are pleasing because "aphoristic and witty." The justice or injustice of every one can be demonstrated by logical argument. "The glory, jest, and riddle of the world" is a phrase in which every word has a definitely circumscribed meaning, a meaning expounded in the lines which lead up to it. Only once does Pope use words which seem to mean more than they state; that is when he calls man a being "darkly wise." But his intention was quite matter-of-fact; when he wrote "darkly wise" he did not mean what Shakespeare would have meant; he did not mean that, as Wordsworth expressed it, "we are wiser than we know"; but simply that we are wise enough to be in doubt about our own nature. This is a scientific observation with a certain amount of emotion behind it; it is not an emotional statement embodying a truthful perception. But Shakespeare's "quintessence of dust" is just this. It might have been written by the author of *The Undying Fire*! Even without the aid of chronology, however, we should recognise it in its



context for something other than a scientific generalisation, although as in a flash the poet has perceived what hundreds of scientists have laboured to prove. Still less matter-of-fact is Shakespeare's "the beauty of the world." The tremendous effect of that phrase when it happens in Hamlet's speech cannot by any means be explained in the language of science. A sufficiently prosaic person, speaking honestly, would declare that it meant nothing at all or was obviously untrue. The torrent of Hamlet's words pours out of a tormented soul; his language is transformed, and common words like *excellent*, *roof*, *fire*, *majestical*, *fretted*, *golden*, *express*, leap into life as "*excellent* canopy, the air," "this *majestical* roof *fretted* with *golden* fire," and "what a piece of work is man . . . in form and moving how *express* and admirable." Shakespeare's words convey information only incidentally; they become the embodiment of a mood so that for the realisation or experience of the mood the reader is compelled to accept the language in which it lives.

In view of the inquiry into verbal sound, it is interesting to note that Pope's passage quoted above contains 142 words; Shakespeare's, 146 words. In Pope the proportion of vowel sounds to consonant sounds is 56 : 100, while in Shake-

speare it is 61 : 100. This does not upset the conclusion previously reached, that prose is less consonantal than verse. Pope's passage is, still, less consonantal than the lyrics of De la Mare, Shelley, and Campion. But if we had not already made the tests in a previous section the conclusion to be drawn from these figures would seem to be that Pope's lower proportion of vowel sounds is an indication of the much lower poetic intensity of his verse compared with Shakespeare's prose. The conclusion which ought to be drawn is that the possibly greater restraint of verse makes for a higher proportion of consonant sounds in the language ; and that, speaking generally, poetic intensity, even in prose, does not produce so high a proportion of vowel sounds as easy-flowing matter-of-fact statement, for Shakespeare's sixty-one vowel sounds to one hundred consonant sounds is a long way from the *Times Literary Supplement* essays, which were found to have sixty-six and seventy vowel sounds to one hundred consonant sounds. So is De la Mare's fifty-nine vowel sounds to one hundred consonant sounds in the passage from "The Vats."

## CHAPTER IX

### DE LA MARE'S STYLE AND CONTENT

His Diction—Syllabic Music—Verse—Vivid Perceptions—  
Metrical Subtleties—Flexible Prose.

AFTER marking the main characteristics of emotive language and poetic diction, the ground is cleared for their examination in the poet's work ; but style and content being radically inseparable, something may be noted as belonging to this work beyond and beneath the poet's individual peculiarities as a literary artist. It is convenient to pass from the consideration of poetic diction to De la Mare's diction first.

Poetic diction appears to differ from prosaic or matter-of-fact diction in the emotive use made of the words rather than in any curious choice of them. As soon as we examine the work of this poet of dream we find his diction poetic in prose as well as in verse, and often the evocative quality appears in beautiful combination with sharp, scientific precision ; especially when the

poet is describing natural objects, landscapes, or states of mind.

“Sotto Voce,” a memory of an afternoon spent with Edward Thomas, who took the poet one day to hear a nightingale

“That sotto voce cons the song  
He'll sing when dark is spread,”

contains description both accurate and beautiful that might have been looked for from a great poetic naturalist like W. H. Hudson rather than from the author of “Arabia.” This is how the poem opens :

“The haze of noon wanned silver-grey,  
The soundless mansion of the sun ;  
The air made visible in his ray,  
Like molten glass from furnace run,  
Quivered o'er heat-baked turf and stone  
And the flower of the gorse burned on—  
Burned softly as gold of a child's fair hair  
Along each spiky spray, and shed  
Almond-like incense in the air  
Whereon our senses fed.”

There follows a lovely passage describing how the two poets listened and heard the whispered song :

“Then silence, and o'er-flooding noon,”

which is an example of the author's psychological accuracy. The truth of that sudden perception

of the flooding sunlight again can be recognised from common experience.

A moth, "isled in the midnight air," lured to the flame, is seen with vivid clearness and described with immense economy that leaves the witchery of dream in the air. The moth

"Stares from her glamorous eyes;  
Wafts her on plumes like mist;  
In ecstasy swirls and sways  
To her strange tryst."

"Plumes" instead of wings is a characteristic substitution of terms by the poet for the sake of a gain in sonority. It is in a sense a trick, but here, for instance, it is a pleasing trick. Where his technique is most accomplished eccentricity rarely touches the purity of the diction, and if some hint of it enters, this is unessential to the effect of the poem. "The Tryst," for example, contains a vocabulary that is peculiar to the poet, as are the images of "forgotten night," "moon-bright company," "Paradise come," "Noah's mouse," and so on. But if we except the word "longingness" the diction is good coin of the realm, and we would be hard pressed to find a satisfactory alternative for "longingness."

Turning to the short stories, in "The Tree" we come across the successful and rather gross and pathetic Fruit Merchant revisiting his



despised half-brother who has starved in the service of art. It is a frosty winter night as he approaches the ragged, lonesome cottage of the artist.

“Time and the night had not tarried during his journey. The east was a blaze of moonlight. The moon glared in the grey heavens like a circular, flat little window of glass.”

Which is imaginative, but prose diction.

In “The Creatures” the narrator meditates in words that have the power of poetry :

“Never was actuality so close to dream. It was not only an unknown country, slipped in between these placid hills, on which I had chanced in my ramblings. I had entered for a few brief moments a strange region of consciousness. I was treading, thus accompanied, amid a world of welcoming and fearless life—oh, friendly to me!—the paths of man’s imagination, the kingdom from which thought and curiosity, vexed scrutiny and lust—a lust, it may be, for nothing more impious than the actual—had prehistorically proved the insensate means of his banishment. ‘Reality,’ ‘Consciousness’: had he for ‘the time being’ unwittingly, unhappily missed his way? Would he be led back at length to that garden wherein cockatrice and basilisk bask, harmlessly at peace?”

Such words are at once precise logically and charged with a dream atmosphere. The same thing applies to the diction of *Henry Brocken* and *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*. The *Songs of Childhood* and *Peacock Pie* are marked by the author's not always successful employment of words for a quaint effect. If any one but De la Mare had made such free use of *dreariment*, *lissoinely*, *wis*, *lovely*, *faërie*, *shin-shining*, *knick-knackerie*, *eftsoones*, *lonesome*, *tightsome*, *waesome*, and *glamourie*, the result would probably have been insupportable. Even where this eccentric diction is used with the least effect of inappropriateness, the success of the piece is not due to such words. Just as the rhythm of many of the child poems recalls that of the old border ballads, so does the vocabulary. But the essence of the old ballad, whether fantastic, humorous, or passionate, is not in the diction, which was perfectly natural. The use of *leggen bones*, *mimbling-mambling*, *jimp*, *hie*, *shoon*, *lanthorn*, *ghostie*, and *gnomie* does not explain the success of *Peacock Pie* and *Songs of Childhood*. The least eccentric in diction are frequently the finest of De la Mare's child poems. "The Silver Penny" is a remarkable reincarnation of the old ballad. So is "The Pilgrim"; and "The Englishman" would be if it were not also charged with so

much of the imaginative glamour of *The Ancient Mariner*. In this class of work the poet is at his best, whether humorous or fantastic, when the Scottish ballad and Percy's *Reliques* alike are but a dim background. "The Bando," "Mima," "Alas, Alack!" the tremendously jolly farmers in "Off the Ground," the wizardry (or is it witchery?) of "I met at Eve the Prince of Sleep," "The Hare," "I saw Three Witches," owe nothing of value to archaisms. That the poet's archaisms often please must be attributed to his skill in reviving the old ballad language and imbuing it with the modern love of children and childish thought.

### SYLLABIC MUSIC

Peculiarities of the poet's diction, besides that of archaism, can, however, be noted. For instance, it is plain that he uses words with a keen appreciation of their sound values. Nearly all the numerous quotations in this book from his prose and verse contain examples of such a lyrical use of language, which, as we saw, is a faculty of the primitive savage no less than of the subtle modern poet. How carefully and with what consummate skill do we find him playing with words, real or coined, in his prose in order to

compel their sonority to the affective purpose of the language. Here are a few picked at random :

From "The Three Mulla-Mulgars"—*Arakkaboa, Meermut, Tishnar, Nōōmanossi, Immanâla, Oomgarnuggas*, and so on. See the footnote quoted on pp. 82-84 and the "Mulla-Mulgars' Farewell" (p. 203).

From "The Vats"—*Tierra del Fuego, Tuscarora Trough, Mandalay and Guadalajara, animated infinitesimals, brobdingnagian flanks, archangelic or dæmonic, harplike, circumambulations*.

These examples will suffice. If, instead of words, complete phrases are taken, the effect of a musical composition in the language is enhanced. We will place the above words in settings made for them by the author :

#### "THREE MULLA-MULGARS"—

"The valleys of *Tishnar* lie on either flank of the Mountains of *Arakkaboa*."

"From *Tishnar*, too, comes the Last Sleep—the sleep of the world. The last sleep of their own life only is *Nōōmanossi*—darkness, change, and the unreturning. And *Immanâla* is she who preys across these shadows, in this valley. So, too, the Mulgars say '*Nōōma*' when they mean shadow, as 'In the sun paces a leopard's *Nōōma*'

at her side.' *Meermut*, which means in part also shadow, as it were, of lesser light lost in *Tishnar's* radiance, just as moonlight may cast a shadow of a pine tree across a smouldering fire."

"THE VATS"—

"Maybe it was the unwonted silence—a silence unbroken even by the *harp-like* drone of noonday."

"Whether of *archangelic* or *dæmonic* construction, clearly they had remained unvisited by mortal man for as many centuries at least as there are cherries in Damascus or beads in *Tierra del Fuego*."

"So costly, so far beyond price, that this whole stony world's rubies and sapphires and amethysts of *Mandalay* and *Guadalajara* and Solikamsk, all the treasure-houses of Cambalech and the booty of King Tamburlane would suffice to purchase not one drop.

"A fit of shivering came over me . . . as . . . I scanned their enormous sides, shaggy with tufts of a monstrous moss, and scarred with yard-wide *circumambulations* of lichens."

"They lay slumbering in a grave crystal light which lapped, deep as the *Tuscarora Trough*, above and around their prodigious stone plates, or slats, or slabs, or laminæ; their steep slopes washed by the rarefied atmosphere of their site, and in hue of a hoary green."



"And when one looked close on them it was to see myriads of *animated infinitesimals* in crevice and cranny, of a beauty, hue, and symmetry past eye to seize."

"And never have I seen sward or turf so smooth and virginally emerald as that which heaved itself against their *brobdingnagian* flanks."

Does not an examination of these passages indicate that in selecting his words the author is doing much more than choose them as notes in musical phrases? As a note of music every syllable has its value in such gorgeous language. But the sounds and volume of each word have a relation to the meaning. This language is metaphorical, symbolic, realistic simultaneously. It is intensely poetic. Why a phrase like "the valleys of Tishnar" should feel so exactly right is difficult to say. Does not *Tishnar* suggest something bright and very far? *Nōōmanossi*, *Immanâla*, and *Nōōma* are beautiful words which obviously have some just relationship between their sound and meaning. This is due mainly to the effect of the long *o* and *ah* sounds with the hushing, lip-closing *m*. Possibly the *n* in *Immanâla* gives this word a suggestion of the snarling animal. *Meermut* is another fine word for its purpose, the *ee* and short *u* sounds being between the greatest sonority or lowest notes,

or slowest vibrations of the *o* and *ah*, and the highest notes, or quickest vibrations of sound in the light half of *Tishnar*. High or thin vowel sounds, especially *i* and *e*, certainly are associated with quick and little things (pin, tick, slit, chit, flit, wit) and with light or height (bright, clear, sky, beam), while full or heavy vowel sounds are associated with gloom and darkness among other things.

If the quotations from "The Vats" are examined, only *Tuscarora Trough* is found to be a coinage of the poet's, and very effective it is in suggesting a sudden diving into dark depth (*rora Trough*) of gully so steep that the atmosphere of day was dimmed to "a grave crystal light."

The emphatic effect of the repeated *a*'s in *Mandalay* and *Guadalajara*, *Solikamsk*, *Cambalech*, and *Tamburlane* hardly needs pointing out. But their syllables are made to serve the music of the language no less than this representational effect of emphatic and tremendous assertion. Notice how the *a*'s contrast with the sounds of *not one drop* at the end of the quoted sentence, and *so costly* at the beginning. Only *stony* and the *sol* of *Solikamsk* in the course of the sentence remind the reader sharply of the sound of *costly* until, reaching the completion of that over-

whelming enumeration of riches, he learns that these "would suffice to purchase *not* one *drop*." The words between *Tamburlane* and *not* are an interval of musical suspense before the return of what at last is known to be the principal motif—*cost, not, drop*.

In the passage which supports the huge *circumambulations* is ample justification for the choice of such a word. The poet wants to convey a sense of those "enormous sides." They are, he says, "shaggy with tufts of a *monstrous* moss." That startles the mind into attention. It is followed by "*scarred* with *yard-wide circumambulations* of *lichens*," which is a beautiful example of poetic craftsmanship. *Scarred* not only by its meaning conveys to the understanding the appearance of blotched surface between the tufts of monstrous moss: its sound anticipates and therefore strengthens the unexpected word *yard*. *Yard-wide* are two spacious words. But what is all this leading to? *Circumambulations* of *lichens*. The contrast between the vast volume of sound or space covered by *circumambulations* and the creepy little noise of *lichens* is an additional source of meaning which is superimposed upon the ordinary connotations of such words.

*Brobdingnagian* obviously serves by its hard-

ness and vastitude of sound as well as by remote literary associations to describe the *flanks* of those vats against which heaved (like a sea) the green, smooth mass of the turf. *Animated infinitesimals* serves an opposite end, to confirm the effect of *myriads*, and to include the notion of littleness. The numerous syllables (ten for the two words) and the quick, little sounds of the vowels, excepting the full-blooded *a* in *animated*, do indeed represent melodically in the manner of music the poet's idea. *Myriads* is a word very appropriate because, even while meaning great multitudes, it seems somehow to imply of little things.

It will be found that De la Mare does not exercise his skill in the control of voluminous words so readily when he is writing verse. Probably this is because the unit of the verse (or line) would be weighed down so soon by words like *brobdingnagian*. This may have been one reason for his choice of prose as the vehicle for so much poetry; prose afforded him greater liberties in sounding the effective resources of his sonorous diction. The rhythmic beat and repetitive pattern of metre, however, adds to the emotive power of language, and so shoulders part of the function of syllabic sonority.

And evidences abound that he often felt the



lack of verse measures. His prose constantly leaps into little metrical trills, and occasionally begins forming a metrical paragraph in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne's. The first time I read *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* such incipient prosodic movements would echo in my mind for many days: they obviously were more than prose. The following occurs where Thimble and Thumb are sleeping in the Ollaconda-tree, and Nod, keeping watch, hears the wild pigs passing:

"And presently, while they were grubbing in the snow, one lifted up its snout and cried in a loud voice: 'Co—older—and colder!'

" 'Co—older—and colder,' cried another.

" 'Co—older—and colder,' cried a third. And all silently grubbed on as before.

" 'The Queen of the Mountains is in the Forest,' began the first again, 'with fingers of frost.'

" 'And shoulders of snow.'

" 'And feet of ice,' screamed the third.

" 'The Queen of the Mountains,' they grunted all together; and went on burrowing and shouldering, and faintly squeaking."

Here, however, the incipient metre is very beautifully merged into the prose context and



the progress of the narrative. Indeed it is almost a certainty that the author of *Henry Brocken* and *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* gained more than he lost by using prose instead of verse. When he does use verse in his narrative these songs have something of the divine fitness of the sudden songs in Shakespeare's comedies.

In any case, though one may constantly recognise metrical phrases in his prose, one is not disillusioned, does not escape the charm of the prose. Such lines as the following could not be more expressive or appropriate as they actually occur :

“ The vanishing remembrance of voices in a dream.” (“ Seaton's Aunt.”)

“ Like a cloud of morning dew in a dell of wild flowers.” (“ The Looking-Glass.”)

“ But deep, deep down, perhaps, I feared my own desire.”

“ The dew, the depth, and the immortal usualness.” (“ The Bird of Travel.”)

“ Grins not the Lion at the Unicorn ? ”

“ One morning, one shafted scarlet morning, it seems he saw—well I cannot say what exactly he did see.”

"No hand anyhow, but a light-embodied dream." ("Lispet, Lispett and Vaine.")

"A kind of mournful gaiety, a lamentable felicity, such as rings in the cadences of an old folk-song, welled into my heart. I was come back to the borders of Eden, bowed and outwearied, gazing from out of dream into dream,—homesick, 'forsaken.' " ("The Creatures.")

"And in the dead of night she arose out of bed in dream, and with eyes wide open seeing nothing of reality, moved silently through the vacant house." ("The Riddle.")

Such prose has the choice euphuism of the finest Biblical prose—the splendour of the English Ecclesiastes, or the dense sonority of passages like 2 Samuel i. and the Songs of Deborah and Miriam. De la Mare's prose is Biblical also in the constant curbing of the prancing rhythm and the avoidance of any sort of towering structure of complicated sentences. Rich colour and sound, and elementary movements, serve as the vehicle of subtle shades of meaning and exact observation of appearances. Nothing could be more marvellously exact and less vague than the description of an *almost* inexpressible mood in "The Vats." When another writer, not inexcusably, might well be

vague in thought or statement, De la Mare rises to the crest of opportunity, drawing hidden potentialities out of the language.

### HIS VERSE

Examples of vagueness have to be sought in his verse rather than in his prose, and they originate in deficient resourcefulness of language, not of thought, which indeed is at such a moment probably superabundant. In the *Lyrical Poems*, the very first piece is a case in point. "Shadow" consists of three beautiful stanzas. But the parts almost fall asunder instead of being inextricably interdependent. The order of stanzas one and two could be reversed without injuring the poem; such an alteration might in fact be an improvement, because the line,

" Even the beauty of the rose doth cast,"

is a sort of climax and comes more fittingly after instead of before the second stanza. This second stanza does not preserve the internal completeness and unity of the preceding stanza.

" The transient bubbles of the water paint  
'Neath their faint arch a shadow faint,"

is an imaged thought of minute delicacy; but it should have been pursued to a conclusion

tantamount to the ending of the stanza, as in the preceding stanza, the last line,

“And take its strange dream home,”

is also the completion of the thought opened by

“Even the beauty of the rose doth cast,  
When its bright fervid noon is past,  
A still and lengthening shadow in the dust.”

But probably the poet was in difficulties with the rhyme *paint*—*faint*. *Saint* occurred to him and suggested the irresistible loveliness of

“The golden nimbus of the windowed saint,  
Till shine the stars,  
Casts pale and trembling bars,”

which really ought to have found a place in a separate stanza.

The rare and quite satisfying rhyme of *dust* with *past* and *cast*, is a kind of imperfection more pleasing than exact rhyming in which De la Mare rivals Shelley.

“The Flight”<sup>1</sup> is a poem where the thought is still less determined in the expression, and the third stanza is incomprehensible logically, not because a meaning cannot be felt behind the poem, but because the compression of the

<sup>1</sup> In *Molloy and Other Poems*.

language has squeezed out certain connecting links, and also because the two preceding stanzas are almost equally obscure and throw no light on the final stanza. "The Flight" reveals the poet reflecting upon his olden dreams until some kind of philosophy emerges from his faith in beauty. He believes passionately in the transcendence of the spirit of man over time and space and its perishing house of flesh. Evening reminds him of the procession of the passing days; moon and stars turn his thoughts towards an enduring reality that is not snuffed out when the mortal body sleeps, a reality which then becomes more accessible to man's day-imprisoned spirit. But, as the poem is perhaps the nearest approach to incomprehensibility in all that he has written, I charged him with obscurity—and challenged him to explain the last stanza of the poem.

"How do the days press on, and lay  
Their fallen locks at evening down,  
Whileas the stars in darkness play,  
And moonbeams weave a crown—

A crown of flower-like light in heaven  
Where in the hollow arch of space  
Morn's mistress dreams, and the Pleiads seven  
Stand watch about her place.



Stand watch. O days no number keep  
 Of hours when this dark clay is blind.  
 When the world's clocks are dumb in sleep  
 'Tis then I seek my kind."

The poet's explanation is worth many pages of a critic's for admirers of his work. He wrote :

"About the third stanza in 'The Flight': this meant, I think, that in dreams one may voyage far, and perhaps in another Real. The 'dumb clocks' is a kind of inside-out reference: there is no 'time' in sleep: and certainly no audible clock-ticking. We may be collectively and individually of many 'kinds.' But now the stanza looks like a parcel of offals—which, as a matter of fact, we each of us are!"

If the elusiveness of meaning so often caught is remembered, one can only feel surprise at the little obscurity in his work.

In the verse itself is ample evidence that the poet when he is sufficiently interested in an external object can keep his eye—and ear—on it, even when his verse reaches the utmost purity and richness of music. "The Sunken Garden," previously quoted, is one of many poems living in a dream atmosphere which reflects real objects with a strange clarity. "The Bells" is another example of something deeply experienced put into words that hold them in the crystal-clarity

and permanence of the dream. How much that first couplet tells!—

“Shadow and light both strove to be  
The eight bell-ringers’ company.”

Every word is ordinary, and the metrical scheme the commonest in the language, yet the whole scene, as in some “Old Master,” is presented. We can see the group of ringers and their ropes swaying in the light that floods through window and door into the shadowy interior.

“While rang and trembled every stone,  
To music by the bell-mouths blown :  
Till the bright clouds that towered on high  
Seemed to re-echo cry with cry.”

That is a rush of swift imagination joining heaven and earth and sound and sight, but the language and rhythm is of the simplest.

In those ten blank-verse poems entitled “Characters from Shakespeare,” of which three are masterpieces (“Falstaff,” “Juliet’s Nurse,” and “Imogen”), the poet is at his best in saying much in little, much objectively perceived truth in a little compass of simple words. For “Falstaff,” here are three of his lines :

“A blowzed, prodigious man, which talked, and stared,  
And rolled, as if with purpose, a small eye  
Like a sweet cupid in a cask of wine.”

And he continues :

" I could not view his fatness for his soul,  
Which peeped like harmless lightnings and was gone."

Perhaps not even Lamb ever said so much about a Shakespearean character as De la Mare in another of these poetic essays tells of " Juliet's Nurse." Several of the lines in this piece, such as—

" There's not a soldier but has babes in view,"

or

" O, widowhood that left me still espoused ! "

or

" Lie stiff with silks of sixty thrifty years,"

are worthy of the master whose creation inspired the poem. So too are many of those figures of speech : her memory " like an ant-hill " disturbed but never stilled by a twig ; her " babied hands " ever like " lighting doves," and her " arch and lewd and pious " eyes—" blue wells a-twinkle," which could suddenly darken to " paint disaster with uplifted whites." And to see her face, hands, and eyes " is life's epitome." Her few remaining teeth are like " twelve small pebbles " over which chatters the waterbrook of her words. And when " some grey, long summer evening " she dies, " her body shall

" Lie stiff with silks of sixty thrifty years."

The whole passage is only of thirty-one lines, but it is a wonderful re-creation. There is little blank-verse of this condensed power and dramatic metaphor in perfect perspective outside Shakespeare. The fact that it is in blank-verse is sufficient reminder of the poet's versatility in rhythm and metre. There is an enormous range of thought and prosodic technique between these "Characters from Shakespeare," or the "Descriptive Pieces" like "Goliath," and such magical verse as that of "The Listeners," and several others of his best lyrical poems.

"The Listeners" provides a good example of the poet's skill as a metrist. It is one of the most perfect specimens of prosody in the English language—and the most original. It is perhaps more original in a way than Coleridge's *Christabel* or *The Ancient Mariner*, because such accentual verse as he believed he was writing was not a new thing in English prosody. There is no poem which can be compared to "The Listeners" for similarity of rhythm, though the principle on which it is based is simple and elementary. This is merely that in each of the rhythmical divisions of a line which are called feet, a varying number of syllables may appear, so long as they occupy an equal length of time to utter. The principle is obeyed only in the abstract. In the

actual poem all that is required of the poet is a sufficiently clear indication of the basic rhythm. After reading two or three lines one should begin to feel the metrical scheme which is the framework of the poem. What De la Mare seems to have done in "The Listeners" is to alternate lines of the maximum number of rapid syllables which can be borne by the metre with lines carrying just enough of emphatic syllables to beat the underlying metre, so that these short, slow, emphatic lines play in a kind of syncopation with the long rapid lines.

The effect of "The Listeners," its magical power over the mind, is only obtained *through* this wonderful material medium, and comes, as we have seen, from its inducement to dream. But the craftsmanship of the poem is so fine and unexampled that it deserves close attention even in a study that is not intended to be an essay in technique.

The rhythm of the poem is indicated clearly in the first four lines. It is in triple time.

" 'Is there : ánybody | thére ? ' said the | Tráveller,  
Knócking on the | móonlit | dóor ; ^  
And his : hórse in the silence | chámpe'd the | grásses  
Of the : fórest's | férný | flóor. . . ." ^

These are three-foot lines. Very free resolutions occur of trochees into triplet dactyls



(thére said the = ˘ ˘ ˘ ; Tráveller = ˘ ˘ ˘) and into a quadrisyllabic foot (ánybody = ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘) and a quinesyllabic foot (hóirse in the silence = ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘).

The strongly marked metre of the even lines leaves little room for hesitation about the movement of the poem.

If "knocking on the moonlit door" might possibly be read as a tetrameter, thus :

"Knócking | ón the | móonlit | dóor," ^

the fourth line,

"Of the : fórest's | féyny | flóor," ^

could not be read so without damage to the music :

"Óf the | fórest's | féyny | flóor" ^

is stilted. The next two lines put the metre beyond doubt.

"And a : bírd ^ fléw up out of the túrret,  
Abóve the Tráveller's héad."

These are both three-foot lines. But the odd line introduces a fresh variation on the basic metre. This basic metre is in triple time and probably trochaic, each line being equivalent to "fórest's féyny flóor." But

"And a | bírd ^ | fléw up out of the | túrret"

enormously complicates matters. This line may be represented as

oo : 2^ | 5oooo | 2o

but conventional notation would prove here, as in the case of the quinquesyllabic foot, "horse in the silence," that the poet's line will not "scan." Therefore conventional notation is irrelevant, because probably not even the poet himself could improve upon the lovely music of "The Listeners," and certainly no prosodist born could ever do so.

All that is absolutely essential to describe the rhythm of this poem is first the indication of the metre as in triple time ; then each verse (or line) as containing three trochaic feet or such resolutions as will produce variety without destroying the dominance of the basic metre and weakening the poem's unity. Many other interesting variations of the metre occur besides those noted. Listen to this :

" Héarkening in an air | stírréd and | sháken  
By the : lónely | Tráveller's | cáll."^

There are actually five syllables between the first and second stresses in the odd line. If we stick to our scheme of trochaic feet we have to recognise " Hearnkening in an air " as one foot of six syllables. " Impossible ! No such thing in

English poetry ! ” Indeed, my prosodic friend ? But since “ The Listeners ” came into existence there is such a thing. There is even a seven-syllable foot in the same poem. Listen to this :

“ Fell : échoing through the | shádowniness of the still  
| hóuse.”

“ Échoing through the ” is a five-syllable foot, and “ shádowniness of the still ” is a seven-syllable foot.

If the reader has not previously regarded “ The Listeners ” as a poem in trimeters (it is not vitally important whether these are trochaic or iambic) and in triple and not quadruple measure, this analysis will have raised several questions and objections. (a) Is not every metrical “ foot ” an indication of a unit of time ? Can any two lines of an equal number of feet differ in duration, *i.e.* in the time taken to say them ? (b) And, above all, is it not a peculiarity of the genius of English to alternate accented with unaccented syllables ? Is not a five and still more a seven-syllable foot impossible, on the ground that out of so many syllables more than one of them is bound to be accented ?

The answer to (a) is that metrical “ feet ” can never be restricted to the time equivalence found in bars of music, because whereas the notes of music are the composer’s ideas, the

syllables of words are only incomplete ideas of the poet, except when the words are monosyllabic. This is why such verse as

“ Break, break, break,  
On thy cold grey stones, O sea,”

has so readily been fitted into schemes of notation similar to the notation of music, by Sidney Lanier and other prosodists. It is, however, quite a rudimentary metrical type which approaches so nearly the ideal of time-equivalence of the feet. Obeying the principle of musical composition we should have to say that a line like

“ Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house ”

must consist of double the number of bars or feet in a line like

“ Though every word he spake.”

Thus :

“ Though	every	word he	spake
Fell	echoing	through the	shad-
ow	iness of	the still	house.”

And if these lines were taken out of their context and had the conventional prosodist's stethoscope applied to their bewildered heart, they would no doubt seem to bear such a temporal relation to one another. But in the poem we hear from

the outset the dominant metre in the even lines :

“ Knócking on the | móonlit | dóor^  
 Of the : fórest's | férný | flóor^  
 A : bóve the | Tráveller's | héad^  
 ' Is there : ánybody | thére ? ' he | sáid^.”

And the odd lines fall into the scheme beautifully, that is to say, they run along like a wavy line with three main crests or stresses.

The answer to question (b) is that a line may contain more accents than feet. When the basic metre is encrusted with crowds of resolutions as is the trochaic trimeter in the odd lines of “The Listeners,” there will be subsidiary accents between the three main stresses of each line. If the sign ` stands for the intermediate and secondary beats and ' for the foot-stresses, a line like

“ Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house ”  
 will be heard like this :

“ Fell échoing through the shádowniness of the still hóuse.”

Now it is quite obvious to a sensitive reader that the odd lines do obey this dominant trimetric movement of the poem, but it is also indisputable that a line like

“ Fell échoing through the shádowniness of the still hóuse ”



takes longer to hear or to pronounce than

“ Though évery wórd he spáke,”

and therefore that the equivalence is not the equivalence of positive duration but of relation to the poem as a whole. In other words, the odd and even lines above consist respectively of fourteen and of seven syllables, but the fourteen syllables of the odd line are not pronounced exactly twice as quickly as the seven syllables of the even line. But they occupy an average length of time which is less than that occupied by the syllables of the even line. This hastening of the pace of the line is brought about by the compulsive influence of the triple-time and of the three-beat measure, beautifully assisted by the craft of the poet, who fills his long line with such eloquent and easily pronounced sound-sequences as *echoing* and *shadowiness*. Hear how beautifully this device serves to express the final idea of the poem :

“ And how the silence surged softly backward,  
When the plunging hoofs were gone.”

The words *surged softly* seem to roll like a low mist into the vision :

“ And : hów the | sílence sùrged sòftly | báckward.”

Metrical craft is in wonderful co-operation with the poet's verbal craft, which as we have seen

already is, in his prose, exquisite. The one sharp consonantal sound of *k* in

“ Knocking on the moonlit door,”

and the repetitive *ock*, *on* followed by the quiet eeriness of the soft vocables—*the moonlit*; the thud of *d*, not so sharp as the *k*, suggesting a wooden surface behind the metallic knocker; and the final sonority of *or* that is to stir and shake the air of the empty hall inside.

Notice again in

“ Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,”  
how beautifully the light and soft consonants that are producing the image of the intangible moonlight host of listeners are followed by the hard, rigid outlines of *dark stair*. You can see it silhouetted in the moonlight and shadow, and when the Traveller who heard no reply from the phantoms,

“ felt in his heart their strangeness,”

we, too, with this dream-burdened music flooding our ears, we, too, feel “ their stillness answering his cry.”

There follow four lines in which the regressive or infantile thought of the poem is suspended and a self-conscious idea intrudes. The poet felt that the Traveller must knock again and prolong the dramatic suspense.

“ For he suddenly smote on the door, even  
 Louder, and lifted his head :  
 ‘ Tell them I came, and no one answered,  
 That I kept my word,’ he said.”

This almost breaks the mood of the poem which is concerned mainly with the phantom listeners, the “unseen presences,” and with that marvellous moonlight, and rustling forest floor and leaf-fringed sill and backward surging silence—the silence of the womb or the tomb.

Turning from such verse as this back to those “Characters from Shakespeare” or forward to the superb simplicity of “The Scribe,” one is bound to disagree with critics who consider that in rhythm and metre the poet’s range is narrow. This is quite a popular fallacy about De la Mare, that he is “a poet with a single string” or has but one mood to express “o’er and o’er.” The metrical simplicity and regularity of “The Scribe” is no less appropriate than the harmonised intricacies of “The Listeners” or the poignant irregularity of the distracted fool in “Motley” :

“ Ay, music hath small sense,  
 And a tune’s soon told,  
 And earth is old  
 And my poor wits are dense ;

Yet have I secrets—dark, my dear,  
 To breathe you all : Come near.  
 And lest some hideous listener tells,  
 I'll ring my bells."

How simple is this language, compared with "The Listeners." Style indeed fits rhythm and theme with an exquisite adaptability in De la Mare's work, an adaptability often lacking in poets like Swinburne, Tennyson, Wordsworth, and Francis Thompson. It may be because De la Mare is so emphatically not narrow in individuality and mood. One says a great deal in saying that if he is the divine child of phantasy, he is also "The Scribe" of God.

"What lovely things  
 Thy hand hath made,"

he sings, and tells of Earth's "live, willed things,"  
 but

"Though I should sit  
 By some tarn in thy hills,  
 Using its ink  
 As the spirit wills,"

he could never tell all the wonders of life and

"Flit would the ages  
 On soundless wings,  
 Ere unto Z  
 My pen drew nigh ;  
 Leviathan told,  
 And the honey-fly ;

And still would remain  
 My wit to try—  
 My worn reeds broken,  
 The dark tarn dry,  
 All words forgotten—  
 Thou, Lord, and I."

Here is he very close to the Oriental mysticism of a poet like Rabindranath Tagore. "The Scribe" really marks a crescent path from "The Listeners" just as the *Memoirs of a Midget* completes the circle with another crescent starting from *Henry Brocken*.

Among his many stanza forms, that of "Silence" is a particularly pleasing one :

"With changeful sound life beats upon the ear ;  
 Yet, striving for release,  
 The most seductive string's  
 Sweet jargonings,  
 The happiest throat's  
 Most easeful, lovely notes  
 Fall back into a veiling silentness."

It might be a seventeenth-century madrigal. Contrast the movement with that of the following, in his poem "The Reawakening" :

"Green in light are the hills, and a calm wind flowing  
 Filleth the void with a flood of the fragrance of Spring ;  
 Wings in this mansion of life are coming and going,  
 Voices of unseen loveliness carol and sing."

That his work will grow in importance with



his experience is a reasonable inference from his surprising mastery of the two media of literary style, verse, and prose. His prose is more versatile than his verse ; it is more adaptable to his changing purposes than the prose of any other writer of English, if Shakespeare is excepted. It can be heavily charged with poetry : and grave and sonorous, as in " The Vats " ; or " penetrating, pining as voice of nix or siren," as in " The Creatures " ; or simply lyrical, as in " The Riddle " or " The Almond Tree." It assumes all these qualities at various moments in the long prose works. Then it may be broken up and salt with an idiomatic tang, as it is in the mouth of Sarah, in " The Looking-Glass," or of dear old Mrs. Thripps, in " Out of the Deep," and of several characters in the Midget's *Memoirs*. Sometimes it has the movements and inflections and vocabulary of a peculiar temperament—that of " Seaton's Aunt," that of " Miss Duveen," that of Mrs. Monnerie, or that of the inimitable Maunders who tells the tragic romance of " Lispet, Lispett and Vaine." Sometimes De la Mare's prose is terse, forceful, swift, carrying on its unswerving current a rush of actions, as when the thrilling adventure is related of Nod Mulla-Mulgar in the hut of the Gunga-Mulgar (or Gorilla), and its culmination

in the wild and glorious flight beyond reach of the outwitted and enraged Gunga. Another example occurs in chapter v. The Mulgars with their monkey friends, the Men of the Mountains, have been singing to enliven their arduous and perilous journey over the mountains of Arakkaboa. Notice how the prose changes from the slow dreaming music of mountain summits arched with stars to the ejaculatory vividness of the *mêlée* :

“ It was a long song and it lasted a long time, and so many were the verses, that at last even the Men of the Mountains caught up the crazy Mulgar drone and wheezily joined in, too. A very dismal music it was—so dismal, indeed, that many of the eagles who make their nests or eyries in the crevices and ledges of the topmost crags of Arakkaboa flew screaming into the air, sweeping on their motionless wings between the stars over the echoing precipices.

“ The travellers had set to the last verse of the Journey Song more lustily than ever, when of a sudden one of these eagles, crested, and bronze in the torchlight, swooped so close in its anger of the voices that it swept off Thumb's wool hat. In his haste he heedlessly struck at the shining bird with his staff or cudgel. Its scream rose sudden and piercing as it soared, dizzily wheeling in its anger, at evens with the

glassy peak of Kush. Too late the Men of the Mountains cried out on Thumb to beware. In an instant the night was astir, the air forked with wings. From every peak the eagles swooped upon the Mulgars. And soon the travellers were fighting wildly to beat them off. They hastily laid poor Thimble down in his sling and covered up his eyes from the tumult with a shadow-blanket. And with sticks and staves and flaring torches they turned on the fierce birds that came sweeping and swirling out of the dark upon them on bristling feathers, with ravening beaks and talons. But against Thumb the eagles fought most angrily for his insult to their Prince, hovering with piercing battle-cry, their huge wings beating a dreadful wind upon his cowering head. Nod, while he himself was buffeting, ducking, and dodging, could hear Thumb breathing and coughing and raining blows with his great cudgel. The moon was now sliding towards the mouth of Solmi's Valley, and her beams streamed aslant on the hosts of the birds. Wherever Nod looked, the air was aflock with eagles. His hand was torn and bleeding, a great piece of his sheep's jacket had been plucked out, and still those moon-gilded wings swooped into the torchlight, beaks snapped almost in his face, and talons clutched at him.

"Suddenly a scream rose shrill above all the din around him. For a moment the birds hung

hovering, and then Nod perceived one of the biggest of the eagles struggling in mid-air with something stretched and wrestling upon its back. It was a Man of the Mountains floating there in space, while the maddened eagle rose and fell, and poised itself, and shook and beat its wings, vainly striving to tear him off. And now many other of the eagles wheeled off from the Mulgars and swept in frenzy to and fro over this struggling horse and rider, darting upon them, beating the dying Mulgar with their wings, screaming their war-song, until at last, gradually, lower and lower they all sank out of the moonlight into the shadow of the valley, and were lost to sight. The few birds that remained were soon beaten off. Five lay dead in their beautiful feathers on the pass. And the breathless and bleeding Mulgars gathered together on this narrow shelf of the precipice to bind up their wounds and rest and eat. But three of them were nowhere to be found. They made no answer, though their friends called and called, again and again, in their shrill, reedy voices. For one in fighting had stumbled and toppled over, torch in hand, from the path, one had been slit up by an eagle's claw, and one had been carried off by the eagles."

There is again the sensitive and straightforward narrative prose of *The Return* which in



chapter xxii. seems capable of any dramatic inflexions needed by the author for the vivid account of Lawford's surreptitious return to his home. There is a truly dramatic climax in his tense vigil in the darkness of the room next to that in which Mrs. Lawford and her friends are discussing with a thin veil of impartiality the morality and convenience of getting him locked up. Lawford finds himself in the peculiar situation of an invisible spectator of the human play being enacted in his wife's drawing-room. He is isolated, remote, and all-seeing—a sort of wise, ironic, unsuspected ghost. This strange double-plane of existence in *The Return* appears also in *Henry Brocken*. Henry Brocken is not externally concealed from the motley types of humanity he meets on his travels. But those travels go right through the heart of dreamland; he is wandering in the worlds created in other human imaginations. He journeys deeply into the dreams dreamt by Wordsworth, Emily Brönte, Herrick, Perrault (and what cycles of other dreamers who also saw "The Sleeping Beauty" ?), Swift, Bunyan, and Keats (or who first beheld the forlorn knight questing for a lost Beauty ?). Among that motley company of Bunyan's characters in the Inn is he especially the all-seeing ghost, curiously probing the souls



of these human marionettes, seeing life as a play staged beneath his brooding imagination. Is it not this aloof and yet watchful, hungry, sympathetic attitude which lies behind those short stories told through the memories of an observant child? Is it not this same Janus-mindedness, this double rôle of detached, dreaming spectator and anxious seeker, ghost and intense participator in human life, which distinguishes the creator of the immortal Midgetina? *The Memoirs of a Midget* is not only his most mature piece of work in prose but it reveals him by turns in all his variety and wealth of dream, observation, far-glimpsing speculation, and understanding, pitiful sympathy with bewildered, Eden-less mankind.

Among the Midget's toys was a small telescope with which she could examine birds and other small shy things in unobserved carefulness. The Midget herself, her thoughts, her dreams, her presentment of the people she knows, their personalities and the reactions which these produce in her own sensitive soul, make up a world that is, as we have seen, a microcosm of our universe. The very style of the book—its beautiful elaboration of detail; of paragraph, sentence, phrase, syllable; for sound or colour or logical nuance of meaning—belongs

intimately to the Midget because it belongs to her creator.

But viewed by external critical standards, by comparisons with the ideal of prose narrative, the *Memoirs* seem to lack cohesive force. Many of the chapters are so self-completely beautiful. They are like ivory chessmen carved with incredible Oriental patience and skill to a pitch of loveliness which would almost satisfy the possessor of but one or two or three of them, the completion of the set seeming by reason of their separate perfections less urgent, appearing to superadd so little to the sum of the beauty of the parts. And indeed the very intensity of observation, the unresting imaginative penetration of the Midget's mind, is warring continually against the artistic unity of her tale. The tendency of the poetic mind is to encluster every idea with new accretions of thought and image, obeying thus the divine instinct of creation. Life may be viewed as a continual efflorescence out of the nothingness of death. It is a noble conception of the universe which attributes the existence of our percipient minds to a higher intelligence, a creative imagination which has conceived us as ideas and then shaped us. So, dividing outwards into smaller parts—like the tiniest, newest shoots of the tree—

these ideas in the mind of "God" which are living creatures, continue the process of re-creation and efflorescence.

It is the method of poetry to draw, like the Midget, such hoards of association and new vision from the tiniest object of thought. But there lurks in the path of the creative artist a peril to the unity of his work. The centrifugal movement or development around many centres in the *Memoirs* has undoubtedly been reflected in the composition. The elaboration of the parts has blurred the unity of the complete story, which therefore is inferior to the best novels of writers like Hardy and Conrad, not in poetic power, but in harmonic subjection of every part to the whole—in form. The danger confronting De la Mare as a creative artist in literature arises from a tremendous energy of poetic thought incompletely subdued to that shaping power of the creative imagination. The soil of his mind is so fertile that the methodical gardener is hard pressed in his task of preserving the outline of the landscape he intended to impose upon that luxuriant wildness. From a cause opposite to that of the intellectual effeminacy of the decadent writer, his style continually tends in the direction of the disintegration which M. Bourget unerringly marked

as the main symptom of literary decadence. A decadent style, he wrote,<sup>1</sup> is that in which the book disintegrates (*se décompose*) to make room for the independence of the page ; in which the page disintegrates to make room for the independence of the sentence, and the sentence for the independence of the word. Certainly that is a fair description of the change which came over French poetry with the passing of the Parnassians and the arrival of the symbolists. It is also to some extent an account of what was happening to English literature in the 'nineties, when De la Mare was mastering his craft. *Henry Brocken*, containing scenes and chapters of a wonderful beauty, has the same fault as *The Memoirs of a Midget* : its completed whole does not exceed in beauty the sum of the beauty of the parts. Three of the short stories in *The Riddle* volume are exposed to a similar charge—"The Looking-Glass," "The Creatures," "The Bird of Travel." This is why, if *The Memoirs* is the most mature and the richest in content of all our author's books, it must as a work of art rank second to *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, which, by no addition, subtraction, or alteration conceivable (to at least one reader) could be brought nearer to triumphant and

<sup>1</sup> *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine.*

perfect fulfilment of rich diversity in eternal unity.

In prophetic mood one would expect from him a mature sequel, less playful, more definitely satirical, than *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, a work imaginatively situated between this and *The Memoirs of a Midget*.



## CHAPTER X

### THE POET AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

Poetry and the Revival of Romance—The Poet as *Vates*.

WALTER DE LA MARE is one of a group, a small group, of living twentieth-century English poets who are definitely major and not minor poets. Belonging to this group, he is also one of the living poets whose work has been undermining the artistic supremacy of the novel in literature and restoring it gradually to poetry. His first book was published in 1901, and during the following twenty-two years he has produced a body of work which ranks him among the poets we are pleased to call immortal. Of such there are several others, whom, however, we should hesitate to include among the major poets ; and it is only the major poets which concern the present argument.

De la Mare's novel, *The Memoirs of a Midget*, first published in 1921, and his collection of short stories entitled *The Riddle*, published in 1923, far from tending to enhance the power

and influence of prose fiction do in a vital sense augment the author's poetic achievement and contribute to the strongly running stream which is revivifying English poetry. If his verse alone establishes him as more than a fine minor poet, the prose ranks him securely. The reason for his special contribution of poetic thought to the present age can be found in the poet's environment as well as in his intensely poetic genius. That his contribution has been made in the first quarter of this century is a temptation to comparison of English literature to-day with that of the period termed the English romantic revival. The temptation to generalise in terms of epochs and tendencies is apt to bring criticism along perilous paths of unfounded assumption ; but there is a certain amount of *terra firma* on which to base such a comparison. Looking back a century, we find that the poets of the so-called English romantic revival found inspiration in the promise and the failure of revolution and war. England, no less than continental countries, with internal throes of agony was undergoing incalculable social changes which ultimately left the idealists disillusioned. The aristocratic Byron was reduced to pilgrimage, carrying his bleeding heart somewhat ostentatiously across Europe, an inspiration to young French poets but the

beginning of the end of flamboyant romanticism. The democratic Wordsworth averted his enthusiasm from revolution, passed a verdict of spiritual bankruptcy on England in a bitter sonnet, and sought consolation in the harvest of a quiet eye. Mrs. Radcliffe and "Monk" Lewis already typified a flourishing school of novelists, soon to be extinguished, which catered to a jaded palate thirsty for new sensations. The finest efflorescence of poetry, if imperishable, was indeed but the flowering of the mind, and therefore as rare and relatively scarce as the finest poetry of the twentieth century in comparison with the huge mass of contemporary literature. The work of Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle, and of Shelley and Keats and Leigh Hunt,<sup>1</sup> did however restore the glamour and the prophetic authority of the poet. It laid foundations for the fame of poets in the materialistic Victorian Age. The Victorian Age is sometimes represented as less sordid than the present age ; but no modern poet could write in the spirit of Tennyson's

" Fifty years of ever-broadening Commerce !  
Fifty years of ever-brightening Science !  
Fifty years of ever-widening Empire ! "

To-day we are closer to the pre-Victorian epoch. Modern poetry may be nearer to the dreamer

<sup>1</sup> Chiefly in his journalism.

Coleridge than to the meditative Wordsworth, but that is probably because in the present stage of the repetition of history dreaming precedes meditation.

If it is not too soon to generalise about this century, a prophecy may be ventured that the first three decades will be marked most deeply by the rising tide of a new romanticism. The infinite subtleties of physical science, of philosophy, and of psychology during the last fifty years are profoundly altering the mental environment of the artist, who perceives with new assurance a world in a grain of sand. The change from dogma in religion towards an almost scientific mysticism has been accompanied by a revolution in the science of sociology. Social idealism is assuming the garb of common sense. We are less concerned about the political constitution of Utopia because we are preoccupied with the psychology of the individual, recognising in him the soul of society. Freedom in education, a new respect for the child's mind, is an idea which has developed and marched with the growth of paternal government. The revolt of the social conscience against the vision of "Iron Founders and Others," as described by Gordon Bottomley, the vision of "Machines for more machines," is a less impassioned but a more scientific revolt



than the fury of Shelley's "Masque of Anarchy" and the hectic rebellions of Swinburne's Muse. In other words, the modern poet is superseded by science as a crusader, and the brilliance of Mr. Chesterton's twenty-five years' old sword supplies just the appropriate touch of paradox needed to prove the truth of such a conclusion. The modern poet who must write of social horrors becomes a romantic indulging in an orgy of realism, like Mr. W. W. Gibson in a passing phase, a shocked spectator like Mr. Squire, or like Mr. St. John Adcock, a throw-back to the eighteenth-century satirist. Although the poetry written during "the great war" was rarely of permanent value, whenever, as in Mr. W. B. Nichols' "Song of Sharruk," it rose beyond a passing significance, it was essentially romantic in conception and method, building a house for beauty from the shattered fragments of this rejected and perplexing world. Art is an embodiment of the atmosphere of an age.

"Man's intercourse with the world," says Mr. Abercrombie,<sup>1</sup> "is necessarily formative. His experience of things outside his consciousness is in the manner of a chemistry, wherein some energy of his nature is mated with the energy brought in on his nerves from externals,

<sup>1</sup> *Thomas Hardy : A Critical Study*, by Lascelles Abercrombie.



the two combining into something which exists only in, or perhaps we should say closely around, man's consciousness. Thus what man knows of the world is what has been *formed* by the mixture of his own nature with the streaming in of the external world. This formative energy of his, reducing the incoming world into some constant manner of appearance which may be appreciable by consciousness, is most conveniently to be described, it seems, as an unaltering *imaginative desire*—desire which accepts as its material, and fashions itself forth upon, the many random powers sent by the world to invade man's mind.

“ That there is this formative energy in man may easily be seen by thinking of certain dreams ; those dreams, namely, in which some disturbance outside the sleeping brain (such as a sound of knocking or a bodily discomfort) is completely formed into vivid trains of imagery, and in that form only is presented to the dreamer's consciousness. This, however, merely shows the presence of the active desire to shape sensation into what consciousness can accept ; the dream is like an experiment done in the isolation of a laboratory ; there are so many conflicting factors when we are awake that the events of sleep must only serve as a symbol or diagram of the intercourse of mind with that which is not mind—intercourse which only takes place in a region where the outward radiations of man's

nature combine with the irradiations of the world."

Here we have a psychological account of the romantic movement in literature. True, the modern rebels have discarded revolutionary enthusiasms of Shelley and Swinburne. They are busy staking out new ground for poetry in man's inhumanity to animals and in the psycho-analysis of society. The artists who are securely rooted in tradition economise their formative energy and seek illumination in ancient dreams. They are perhaps the true pioneers of vision. Poets like W. B. Yeats and "A.E." have used mysticism and magic as weapons against the stupidity of materialism. Others, like Gordon Bottomley and Walter de la Mare, withdraw spiritually from the chaos of modern society and watch life moving in themselves. These are lineal descendants of the pre-Raphaelites, but they are spiritual brethren of seventeenth-century metaphysical and nineteenth-century romantic revival poets. The career of modern English literature has been paralleled in France, where the Parnassians under Leconte de Lisle succeeded a romanticism which had become flamboyant and sentimental. Symbolists and decadents followed Parnassians, who had become sterile, just as *The Yellow Book* was an after-

math of pre-Raphaelitism. This century has seen in both countries a triple movement—back to simplicity, to mysticism, and to the dream. The “realism” or thirst for ugliness in modern French fiction is also to be found in English and American literature, and probably in German; but this is not indicative of any vital tendency: the only realism which deserves the name is photographic rather than formative. Artistic form implies a severity of selection from the elements of experience which undermines the meaning of “realism.” The true antithesis of romanticism is classicism. Classicism in art demands a stability of philosophical values and a firmly knit body of tradition upon which the imagination can repose while making an orderly survey of experience. The conditions for such a process are unfavourable in the present age. But man’s creative energy is not held in abeyance because of shifting standards and new discoveries. The result is that in a disturbed age a period of what has been called romanticism sets in.

#### THE POET AS *VATES*

This recurrent romanticism in literature arises from the character of art, which can never be negative. The artist must affirm or remain sterile. If he can no longer believe in one

thing he must seek another direction for his faith. To-day we are disillusioned about so many things: we shrug shoulders at Shelley's "Anarchy," at Rousseau's "Fraternity"; we smile, rather grimly, to hear the sedate Wordsworth reminding Almighty God:

" But thy most dreaded instrument  
For working out a pure intent,  
Is Man arrayed for mutual slaughter;  
Yea, Carnage is thy daughter."

Don Juan's sexual aberrations seem too puerile to be even interesting, for we have Jung and Freud, not to speak of their disciples. Browning's "Asolando" marching breast forward and Henley as Captain of his own soul both seem by some trick of the light to have assumed an air of strutting on the stage of life. The very planks of the stage have been dissolved by the chemist into electrons! Only the mystics with their unwavering certainty, and the dreamers of dreams with their beautiful expression of our innate wishes, appeal effectively to the modern intelligence. Our unhappiness to-day is due to the gulf between the individual and the herd. Never before has there been such friction between the individual's simple wish to live a quiet life and the tendency of the State to place him in economic destitution or to hurl him out of his



orbit into a war he does not understand. "The life of Europe," says a wise essayist, "is expressed in the architecture of Europe, in its pictures; the history of Europe is for the most part the record of the ever-renewed attempt, under one pretext or another, at its destruction. Life is triumphant; it is never destroyed; indeed it is indestructible, but it is cruelly injured, hindered, limited, thwarted, retarded from age to age. It is not too much to say that the life of Europe is something which has persisted in spite of the history of Europe." <sup>1</sup>

Now the growing fame of Walter de la Mare has been coincident not merely with the development of his art, but with the culmination of modern disillusionment. One by one the strongholds of our self-satisfaction have dissolved like clay cliffs before the tides of experience. There was a time when civilised society was indignant to be told that this planet was not the centre of the universe, and that probably God has other interests besides Man. The glory of "mutual slaughter" was tarnished, and we may hope that the final "sensation" of civilised warfare has effectually toppled the crown from the head of Mars. The next war will be a cold-blooded business. The old scientific Utopias and

<sup>1</sup> R. L. Gales, *Old-World Essays*.



earthly paradises have passed their apogee ; the anthropologist and psychologist hastened their declension by delving into man's moral sense or " conscience." That we are no better than we ought to be is realised with far more conviction than when we could feel uplifted after confessing to be miserable sinners. But never has human experience held such an intensity of life, such promise of marvellous discovery in past and future. The last word is not with the poet who says :

" Main street runs through the middle of the town,  
And there is a dirty post office  
And a dirty hall  
And a dirty railroad station,"

because we do not approach the oracle to hear that, or only that. Our unquenchable desire for the lost paradise will leap up to hail the lonely voice of the poet crying out on the midnight air :

" Where blooms the flower when her petals fade,  
Where sleepeth echo by earth's music made,  
Where all things transient to the changeless win,  
There waits the peace thy spirit dwelleth in."

How eagerly we will accompany him to Arabia,

" 'Mid the verdurous vales and thickets,  
Under the ghost of the moon,"

and with him address the fabled Thule :

“ If thou art sweet as they are sad,  
 Who on the shore of Time's salt sea  
 Watch on the dim horizon fade  
 Ships bearing love and night to thee” . . .

and share the childish comfort of the solitary Listener, who companions himself with invisible presences after he has left the noisy market-places of the world far away.

Thus the poetry of an epoch may be described as its unconscious night-dream turned into day-dream. Not only nymphs, satyrs, fairies, and ghosts have been born of the unconscious mind's dreaming but Man's fabulous Paradises, his perception of a stable reality against which the tidal seas of change beat ever in vain. The poet as prophet derives his divine right from oracular intimacy with the envioning mind of society, not the mind expressed in its Parliament or its newspapers, but in the secret reactions to experience which reveal themselves fitfully in dreaming. He has “ a power of utilising a wider range of faculties in some degree innate in all.” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> F. W. H. Myers, *Human Personality*.



## APPENDIX A

### BOOKS BY WALTER DE LA MARE

(WITH DATES OF FIRST EDITIONS AND PUBLISHERS)

*Songs of Childhood.* Longmans, 1901.

*Henry Brocken : His Travels and Adventures in the Rich, Strange, Scarce-imaginable Regions of Romance.* Murray, 1904 (now Collins).

*Poems.* Murray, 1906 (mostly in Constable's *Collected Poems*).

*The Three Mulla Mulgars.* Duckworth, 1910.

*The Return.* Arnold, 1910 (now Collins).

*A Child's Day : A Book of Rhymes.* Constable, 1912.

*The Listeners, and Other Poems.* Constable, 1912.

*Peacock Pie : A Book of Rhymes.* Constable, 1913.

*The Sunken Garden, and Other Poems.* Beaumont, 1917.

*Motley, and Other Poems.* Constable, 1918.

*Flora : A Book of Drawings by Pamela Bianco (with Illustrative Poems by Walter de la Mare).* Heinemann, 1919.

*Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination : A Lecture.* Sidgwick & Jackson, 1919.

*Collected Poems : 1901 to 1918.* 2 vols. Constable, 1920.

*Crossings : A Fairy Play, with Musical Notes.* Beaumont Press, 1921 (now Collins).

*Story and Rhyme : A Selection from his own Work by the Author.* Dent, 1921.

*The Veil, and Other Poems.* Constable, 1921.

*Memoirs of a Midget.* Collins, 1921.

*Down-a-Down Derry : A Book of Fairy Poems.* Constable, 1922.

*Lispert, Lispett and Vaine.* *Bookman's Journal*, 1923.

*Thus Her Tale : A Poem.* Porpoise Press, 1923.

*The Riddle, and Other Stories.* Selwyn & Blount, 1923.

*Come Hither ! An Anthology for the Young of all Ages.* Constable, 1923.



## APPENDIX B

IN view of the facts about Mr. de la Mare's ancestry given in Chapter II., the following particulars of Robert Browning's biography and relatives are of interest.

William Sharp, in his *Life of Robert Browning*, says :

“ It is interesting to know that many of the nature touches (in ‘Pippa Passes’) were indirectly due to the poet's solitary rambles . . . in the wooded districts south of Dulwich, at Hatcham, and upon Wimbledon Common, where he was often wont to wander and ramble for hours. . . .”

In the *Browning Society's Papers* for 1890, Part XII. (pp. 26-45), Dr. Furnivall writes a valuable account of “Robert Browning's Ancestors.”

He traces the poet's descent from a “Robert Browning the First,” who was a butler.

Robert Browning III. was in the Bank of England. He married twice. From his second

marriage in 1789 with Margaret Tittle, a Creole of St. Kitts, Robert Browning IV. was born. This Robert Browning IV. was also in the Bank of England. He was the father of Robert Browning the poet, who died in 1889, and of Sarah Anna or Sarianna (as she was called), who was her brother's constant companion after Elizabeth Barrett Browning's death. She survived her brother.

William Shergold Browning, who wrote *A History of the Huguenots in the Sixteenth Century*, was a son of Robert Browning III. by his first marriage.

Among the inscriptions on a tombstone in Pentridge Churchyard are the following :

" In memory of JANE BROWNING, who died 16th July 1773, aged 44 years.

" THOMAS BROWNING, husband of the above, 5th Sept. 1794, aged 73.

" WILLIAM BROWNING, their son, an officer in His Majesty's ship *Sybil*, and he was unfortunately drowned in St. John's (?) harbour, 21st Jan., died 1781, aged 22."

This naval officer would have been almost a contemporary of the naval surgeon, Dr. Colin Arrot Browning—Mr. de la Mare's grandfather.

From Robert Browning III.'s second marriage,

with Margaret Tittle, there were two daughters (Louisa and Sarah), who remained spinsters. Dr. Furnivall did not give the date of Louisa's death, but referred to Sarah (born 1814) as "still living" (in 1890). Assuming that Jane Conolly was correct in referring to the "two rather short stout women in old-fashioned peaked shawls, rather hustled away by Mrs. Browning," as relatives of "the Brownings of Hatcham," then there is little doubt that they were Louisa and Sarah.

The "Third Codicil (28th Oct. 1833) to the will of Robert Browning III." ran as follows :

"This is a codicil to the will dated [2]1st August 1819. Whereas I have advanced the sum of two hundred pounds to my daughter Louisa Browning of Dartmouth Row, Blackheath, for the purpose of assisting her in the formation of her establishment in that place, this is to certify that it is my wish that the said sum of two hundred pounds be set apart for [from] the rest of my estate, and be applied to the use and benefit of my three daughters Louisa Browning, Jemima Smith Browning (who afterwards married), and Sarah Browning. . . ."

The "establishment" was a school at which Louisa and Sarah both lived. The school was, of course, not very far from Woolwich Dockyard.

Within a radius of a few miles lie Hatcham, Woolwich, Peckham (or Camberwell), and Dulwich.

Sarah Anna, the sister of the poet Robert Browning, lived at Peckham. According to the *British Weekly* of 20th December 1889, she was on the list of members of the (Congregational) Church in York Street (Walworth) in 1806.

The poet's father and family lived in Southampton Street, Peckham, near New Cross. They then removed to Hatcham, and the second family of Robert Browning III. (*i.e.* the family of Louisa and Sarah) lived nearly opposite them in Albert Terrace.

## APPENDIX C

*(The author's personal views about the prosody of "The Listeners" will be found in Chapter IX. The following Note and Analysis is specially contributed by Dr. William Thomson, whose monumental book, "The Rhythm of Speech," is an attempt to give to prosody a notation as accurate as the notation of music.)*

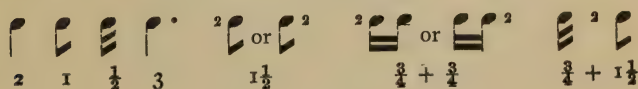
THE versification of Mr. Walter de la Mare's "The Listeners" raises an issue of uncommon interest. A certain poet thinks that all the lines, though varying in rhythm, occupy in utterance approximately the same time, but says nothing of the accentual and other structure by which the uniformity could be effected. And a literary man of great experience, avoiding the point of line-duration, takes all of them to be structurally alike in having three stresses, and structurally different in containing from two to seven syllables to a foot. Neither description tells the actual rhythm. The poet, of course, knows how he himself reads his uncanny but strangely beautiful poem. He may imagine his readers to be as wise as himself. A common mistake. All they



can do is to try to come to some agreement as to his probable rhythmical intention in each case. We cannot afford, on any pretext, to be indifferent where the artist has presumably taken infinite pains. Accordingly I venture to put forward for consideration my view of the matter. It involves the conception of *vers libre*. The verse I take to be a variety devoid of rhyme and of all other structural limitations except division into lines. In matter, diction, imagery, and so on, this so-called verse is not clearly distinguishable from verse proper on the one hand, or, on the other, from poetic, emotional prose. The latter frequently shows a tendency to sway towards the rhythm of the former, and we perforce often hesitate between a prose and a verse reading equally familiar to the ear. That being premised, I submit that the elusive metre of "The Listeners" is one new to English verse, and composite in structure, its odd lines being *vers libre* fitly attuned to its even lines, which are a well-known three-accent type, slightly modified.

So much for the large scale. I now give a rhythmical analysis of the whole poem, from which the reader will gather to what extent, in the long odd lines, I personally have been influenced by prose and by verse-rhythm respectively.

The notational method of distinguishing the stronger and weaker accents will be obvious. For purposes of expression the quantities supplied are subject to elasticity and *tempo rubato* just as in music, with other similar modifications due to lighter or heavier syllables. The handling of the line-ends is left to the reader's discretion. For an obvious reason the more or less long or short syllable before a break can have no quantity. In the verification of quantities it must be kept in mind that, whether singly or in groups, they have nothing to do with others unless they stand to these in the equal or in the double ratio. For example, no ear deduces  $\frac{3}{4}$  from 1. But, given  $2 + 1$ , we easily deduce  $1\frac{1}{2} + 1\frac{1}{2}$ , and, from  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ . To enhance the dual character of the poem as confronting the world of man with that of spirits, I suggest two sets of voice-tones, according as the lines are odd or even. As a device for a similar purpose, I use plain figures in noting the odd lines, and, for the even ones, the symbols used in music. The correspondence is shown in



## RHYTHMICAL ANALYSIS OF "THE LISTENERS"

"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller,

$\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  |  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  |  $1\frac{1}{2}$  1  $\frac{1}{2}$  |  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Knocking on the moon - lit door;

|  |

And his horse in the silence champed the grasses,

$\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  |  $1\frac{1}{2}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  | 1 2 | 2 1 |  $\frac{3}{4}$

Of the for - est's fern - y floor:

<sup>2</sup>  |

And a bird flew up out of the turret,

$\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  | \*  $1\frac{1}{2}$   $1\frac{1}{2}$  | 3' | 1 1 1 |  $\frac{3}{4}$  \* | 2 1 |

A - bove the Traveller's head:

 |

And he smote upon the door a - gain a second time;

$\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  |  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  1  $\frac{1}{2}$  |  $1\frac{1}{2}$   $\frac{2}{3}$  : 2 1 | 1 1 :

"Is there any - body there?" he said.

<sup>2</sup>  :

But no one de - scended to the Traveller;

$\frac{3}{4}$  |  $\frac{3}{4}$   $1\frac{1}{2}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  |  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  :  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

No head from the leaf-fringed sill

<sup>2</sup>  |

Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,

$1\frac{1}{2}$  | 1 1 1 | 2 | 1 1 1 | 2 |

Where he stood per - plexed and still.

<sup>2</sup>  |

But only a host of phantom listeners

1 | 1½ ¾ ¾ | 2 1 | 1½ 1½ | ¾ ¾

That dwelt in the lone house then

♩ | ♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ | ♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ |

Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight

| 2 | ¾ ¾ 1½ 1 | ½ | ¾ ¾ 1 ½ | 1½

To that voice from the world of men:

♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ | ♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ | ♩ ♩ |

Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,

| 2 | 1 1½ ¾ | 2 | 1½ 1½ ¾ ¾ | 2 |

That goes down to the emp - ty hall,

\* ♩ ♩ ♩ | ♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ | \* ♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ | ♩<sup>3</sup> ♩ |

Harkening in an air stirred and shaken

| 1 ½ 2' ½ ½ | 3 | 2 1 | 1

By the lone - ly Traveller's call.

♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ | ♩ ♩ | ♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ |

And he felt in his heart their strangeness,

¾ ¾ | 1½ ¾ ¾ | 3' 1½ | 1½

Their still - ness answering his cry,

♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ | ♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ | ♩ ♩ ♩<sup>2</sup> ♩ |

While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,

¾ ¾ | 2 | 3' | 1 1½ ¾ | 2 |




'Neath the starred and leaf - y sky;

♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ |

For he suddenly smote upon the door

$\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  |  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $1\frac{1}{2}$ ' |  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $1$   $\frac{1}{2}$  |





even Louder and lifted his head:—

 |  |  |

"Tell them I came, and no one answered,

|  $1$   $1$   $1$  |  $3\frac{1}{2}$ '  $1$  |  $1$   $1$  |  $1\frac{1}{2}$




That I kept my word," he said.

 |  |  | \*  :

Never the least stir made the listeners,

|  $\frac{2}{3}$   $\frac{2}{3}$   $\frac{2}{3}$  |  $2$  |  $2$  |  $1\frac{1}{3}$   $\frac{2}{3}$  |  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Though every word he spake

|  |  |  |

Fell echoing through the shadowi-ness of the still house

$1\frac{1}{2}$  |  $\frac{2}{3}$   $\frac{2}{3}$   $\frac{2}{3}$  |  $1\frac{1}{3}$   $\frac{2}{3}$  |  $\frac{2}{3}$   $\frac{2}{3}$   $\frac{2}{3}$  : \*  $2$   $\frac{1}{2}$   $\frac{1}{2}$  |  $2$  |  $* 1\frac{1}{2}$   $1$   $\frac{1}{2}$

From the one man left a - wake:

 |  |  |

Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,

| \*  $2$   $1$  |  $2$   $1$  |  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  |  $\frac{3}{4}$  \* |  $3\frac{1}{2}$   $1$  |

And the sound of iron on stone,

 |  |  |

And how the silence surged softly backward,

$1$  |  $2$   $1$  |  $1\frac{1}{2}$   $3$  |  $3$  |  $2$   $1$  |  $1\frac{1}{2}$

When the plunging hoofs were gone.

 |  |  |



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